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THE JAMES BOYS' LAST FLIGHT;

OR,

CARL GREENE'S GREATEST VICTORY.

By D. W. STEVENS.



Timberlake saw the storm coming, and strove in vain to avert the oncoming tide. But his men broke and fled. The bandits, with reins in their teeth and a pistol in each hand, plunged right among them.

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The James Boys' Last Flight;

OR,

Carl Greene's Greatest Victory.

By D. W. STEVENS.

Author of "The James Boys' Signal Lights," "The James Boys Jailed," "The James Boys' Boldest Raid," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE WAGONER.

It was night.

The moon had just risen to take the place of the sun that had set some two hours before.

The pale silver rays glistened on the hard-beaten road leading over Calvin's Hill, with its yellow clay banks on either side and the dense woods beyond.

Suddenly two horsemen appeared on the top of the hill. They were riding rapidly, as if pursued.

A loud report from beyond the hill rang out, and a bullet humming through the air passed between the horsemen, struck the ground and bounced, hummed and rolled down the hill.

The horsemen did not accelerate their speed at this shot.

"They are not far off, Frank," said one rider.

"No."

"I wonder who they are."

"I don't know, Jesse."

"They may get enough chasing the James Boys," said the man called Jesse, turning in his saddle and gazing back behind him, without slackening the speed of his coal-black charger.

But they had dropped so far below the top of the hill that they could not see the approaching enemy.

The two fugitive horsemen were none other than the famous James Boys.

We presume that every reader of this story has heard of the James Boys, the world-renowned Missouri outlaws.

Their names have become famous in history and will endure throughout all time.

Though they could see no pursuers they could hear the roar of hoofs coming after them.

"Jesse," said Frank.

"Well, Frank?"

"Have you any idea who they are?"

"Our pursuers?"

"Of course."

"Timberlake?"

"May it not be Carl Greene?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Carl Greene never comes with a gang."

"That is true, Jesse."

"He prefers to act independently."

"Well, if it is only Timberlake we might make a fight."

"No."

"Why?"

"It would be very injudicious to fight a score of men."

"Are there that many, Jesse?"

"Yes, there are."

"I didn't suppose they exceeded six."

"Six!"

"Not more."

With a low laugh Jesse James said:

"Listen to that roar of hoofs, and then you will know there are more than six."

"By George, Jesse, you are certainly correct!"

"Don't you know there are twenty?"

"Yes."

"And their horses are fresh."

"Of course."

"While ours are about played out."

"You are right, Jesse. Siroc and Jim Malone have had a long run, and even for them it will be impossible to hold out much longer. A three days' flight is something terrible!"

"Any other horses than these would have been knocked under long ago."

"You are right, Jesse."

"As for Siroc, he does not show much sign of fatigue yet."

"No," Frank answered, with a strange shake of the head, "but, Jesse, Siroc is no ordinary beast."

"No."

"I sometimes hardly believe that beast is mortal."

"He is extraordinary."

"He can live on nothing, travel forever at any rate of speed, and carry any weight."

"Well, there never existed but one Siroc," said Jesse James, proudly, "and there will never be another."

"You are right."

"I could now easily ride away and leave the pursuers far behind did I wish, but I am not going to desert you, Frank."

They galloped on in silence.

The steadily increasing roar told them that their pursuers were approaching nearer.

Frank James looked uneasily about them.

The broad rays of the full moon filled all the forest with a glorious silver light.

The dark woods seemed to the flying bandits to offer abundant hiding-places.

Frank's anxious eyes were so often turned inquiringly toward the woods that Jesse James at last said:

"Frank!"

"What?"

"Do you think we could do it?"

"We might try."

"Let us."

"I am willing."

"Here we go."

"Lead on."

"Follow me."

They wheeled their horses to the left, and dashed away into the bushes.

Down a narrow path they flew. Jesse James took the lead and Frank followed.

The great tall trees rose on each side, and their giant branches tossed upward, interlaced above their heads.

Half a mile and Jesse James called:

"Halt!"

The roar of hoofs could be heard back by the road.

"Frank, they are slackening up," said Jesse.

"Yes."

"I think we will soon have them on our trail."

"Do you, Jesse?"

"Yes."

"Listen."

The night was very still.

Not a breath of air stirred a leaf on a tree and sounds could be distinctly heard a long distance away.

"Frank, I believe I hear them talking."

"I thought I did, too."

"The wind, what little there is, sets toward us," said Jesse.

"It does."

"One thing is quite sure, Frank."

"What is it?"

"They have stopped."

"There can be no doubt of that, and there can be no doubt but that we will soon have them on our trail."

"I am quite sure of it."

"Let us be moving."

"I have thought so."

Once more they wheeled their horses into the road or path and pushed on through the woods.

The path was so narrow and rugged, and the branches of the trees so thick that Jesse at last dismounted.

"Further riding is hardly safe," he said.

They pushed on down into a dark glen, and then up a hill and along a wild rocky ravine.

Both of them were compelled to dismount and lead their horses.

At last they halted.

"Jesse, do you hear anything more of them?"

"No."

"They'll never follow us here."

"Well, they'll never get out if they once get in this place," said Jesse.

"Won't they?"

"No."

"Then how are we to get out, I would like to know?"

"Well, that question puzzles me. I don't believe any one would find their way here by daylight."

Frank James laughed.

The woods about them were so dense that the rays of the moon could scarce penetrate the branches overhead, and all below was intense darkness.

Jesse James at last said:

"Frank, we had as well camp."

"This is no place to camp," Frank answered.

"Well, let us look out a locality—I am becoming sleepy."

"Well, lead on."

Jesse led Siroc up a steep, rocky embankment.

They halted near the root of a tree.

It was a giant old oak, the trunk all covered with moss, and its lofty branches thrown far and wide into the air.

Jesse James and his brother thought this would be an excellent place to wait until morning.

"Who shall sleep first?" Jesse asked.

"Let us decide it by lot."

"Well, how?"

"Draw straws."

"There are no straws to draw."

"Then let us draw sticks."

"Well, get them."

Jesse James got two small twigs from a branch of the tree, and breaking one a little shorter than the other, held them toward Frank, saying:

"There—long sleeps first, short stands guard."

"Good!"

"Draw."

"Here goes."

"Short, by jingo!"

"Just my luck!" growled Frank. "Luck is always against me."

"Well, we can't all be lucky, and while you deplore your ill-luck, let me sleep."

"Snore away."

Jesse James threw himself on the grass beneath the tree and was soon buried in sleep.

How long he had slept he did not know.

But he was awakened by a light kick in the side and Frank in a low tone said:

"Get up."

"Well, what is, Frank?"

"Whist!"

Jesse leaped to his feet and began rubbing his eyes.

"Frank, Frank!" he whispered, drawing his revolver.

"Some one is coming."

"Where?"

"Listen and you will hear the footfall."

It was very still. Jesse listened a short while.

Then he heard footsteps coming.

For a brief moment the tramp—tramp—tramp could be heard, and then all became silent.

The man advancing had stopped as if to listen. Again he came on.

He drew nearer and nearer, halting as if to listen, just as a hunter carefully stalks the deer.

He would soon be so near that the James Boys would not dare converse even in whispers.

Jesse said:

"Frank, leave him to me."

"Is there only one?"

"One is all."

"It may be Carl Greene?"

"No, it is not. Carl Greene does not act in this manner. That fellow advancing on us has all the characteristics of a greeney."

Again the careful footfalls could be heard rustling the leaves and he came nearer and nearer.

Jesse James slowly glided from the tree into the darkness beyond.

Frank James, with cocked revolver, stood awaiting his brother's actions, ready to spring to his aid at the first call of danger.

Jesse glided noiselessly forward toward the man who was approaching him.

He laid down among some bushes.

Then he rose and listened.

"He is coming."

He came.

He was groping his way forward, carefully

listening for any sound, and trying hard to pierce the darkness with his eyes.

But to see far in the dense thicket was impossible.

Suddenly some one sprang up from the ground and seized his throat.

Quick as a flash a powerful form hurled him flat on his back.

The cold muzzle of a revolver was placed against his temple, and a low, deep voice at his side said:

"Speak or move and you are a dead man!"

He could not speak.

In a trice Jesse James had him gagged and bound.

Raising the man in his strong arms as easily as if he had been an infant, he swung him on his shoulder and carried him forward to where Frank and the horses were.

This place he called his camp.

"Jesse!"

"Well?"

"How is it?"

"All right."

"What have you got there?"

"A thing called a man."

With this Jesse dropped him on the ground with a thump which caused the poor fellow to groan.

"Now, sir, can you speak?" asked Frank.

"Not until I take the handkerchief from his mouth," Jesse said.

"Well, take it off."

"All right."

Jesse removed it.

"Now, my good fellow, if you will talk all right and tell us the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, you have a fair prospect for leaving these old woods alive. But if you should prevaricate or make any misstatements, or tell us a falsehood I cannot be answerable for any calamity that may befall you."

"I will answer."

"Will you deceive us?"

"No."

"Will you mislead us?"

"No."

"Tell us all?"

"Every word."

"Very well. Who are you?"

"Allan Pierce."

"Well, Allan, what are you doing here?" Jesse James asked.

"I came with Timberlake."

"For what purpose?"

"To catch the James Boys."

"How many men has Timberlake?"

"Eighteen."

"With you?"

"Yes."

"Where are they?"

"Scattered all over the woods searching for you," answered the captive.

"Where is Timberlake?"

"At the lower bridge."

"Guarding it?"

"Yes, sir."

"So we cannot cross?"

"That is it."

"Is it? Well, we may be able to deceive him."

"I hope you won't harm me."

"So do I."

Then Jesse asked:

"How many men has he with him?"

"Timberlake?"

"Yes."

"Six."

"And the others are scattered about looking for us?"

"Well, Frank, there are seven to two at the bridge. Can we fight them?"

"Yes—but the odds are great."

"I know it."

"What are you going to do with me?" asked the prisoner.

"I can't answer for the present," Jesse replied.

"Don't kill me."

"That all depends—"

Leaving the prisoner bound hand and foot on the ground at the root of the tree, Jesse took Frank aside for consultation and said:

"Frank!"

"Well, Jesse?"

"We've got to do something with ourselves."

"I have thought as much."

"We are hemmed in here by a bend of this river and completely cut off."

"Jesse, we are in a bad box."

"We must cross that bridge."

"How can we?"

"I do not know, but we must."

"There are seven?"

"Yes."

"Three and a half to one?"

"Yes."

Frank reflected for a few moments, and then said:

"Well, Jesse, we have fought that odds many a time."

"Yes," Jesse admitted with a sigh, "but it was when we had to. We are getting old enough and have gone through enough to know what we are about, and never run to break our necks to get into a fight."

"No."

Then Jesse went back to the prisoner and asked:

"What stream is this we have to cross?"

"Salt river."

"Is this bridge which Timberlake is guarding the only crossing?"

"It is all."

"Well, we must storm it if we can do no better."

"And what are you going to do with me?"

"We will leave you here."

"Tied?"

"Yes."

"Why, I will starve in these woods—I will die!"

"We can't help it."

"Oh, this is cruel! Better be killed at once and done with it."

"Very well, you can have your choice," said Jesse James, cocking his revolver.

"Oh, no, no, no, I would rather not."

"I thought so."

Jesse put up his revolver.

The prisoner began to flatter himself that he could raise a yell as soon as left alone and call some of his assistants to his aid.

But he was doomed to disappointment.

Jesse James, stooping over him, said:

"My fine fellow, for fear you may raise an outcry and betray our plans I believe I shall have to bind a handkerchief again over your mouth."

"Oh, don't."

"Why?"

"I will make no outcry."

"But you might."

"Please don't gag me. That will doom me to a slow and terrible death."

"Oh, no. There are a thousand chances, you know, for you to escape. Some one may find you. The vultures or wild cats might tear off the gag or cut the cords that bind you."

"Cruel! cruel! cruel!" gasped the man, as he lay kicking and struggling, but perfectly helpless on the ground.

At last Jesse bound the handkerchief over his mouth and went away.

He turned to Frank and said:

"Come, let us go."

They led their horses across the ravine, and by making a circuitous route, reached the hard beaten road about three miles from the bridge.

"Now, Frank, we've got to decide which we shall do," said Jesse James, coolly. "Shall we charge right on the bridge, shoot down the guard and dash over it, or shall we try strategy?"

"What kind of strategy?"

"I don't know."

At this moment they heard the distant rumbling of a wagon.

"Frank, do you hear that?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Wagon wheels."

"They are coming this way."

"I know it."

Then they listened a while longer.

Jesse said:

"Frank, I've got an idea."

"What is it?"

"I can't explain it until I see the wagoner."

Frank gave his brother a curious look.

"What do you mean, Jesse?"

"Well, you will understand all when we put the plan in action."

"Is it a strategy to cross the bridge?"

"Yes."

"Well, let us try it."

They wheeled their horses about and had ridden about half way up the hill when Jesse said:

"Let us get out in the bushes."

"I am willing."

They then reined their horses out of the road into the bushes and came to a halt.

The moon shone almost light as day, and the hard-beaten road, drawn like a broad belt over the hill, glistened in the moonlight.

Jesse and Frank had not long to wait.

In a few moments the wagoner appeared.

He was slowly driving down the hill.

Jesse said:

"Wait here, Frank."

Then he galloped out to the wagon, which had a cover over it, and said:

"Stop!"

"Wot yer want?" asked the wagoner.

"Who are you?"

"None o' yer business!"

"Yes, I am the census taker, and I want to know your name; here is my card," and to the amazement of the wagoner a ponderous cocked revolver was thrust in his face.

"Oh—ow—ouch!"

"What is your name, please?"

"Tom Griggs."

"Where do you live?"

"Lakewater Township, on the Sorrel."

"Where are you going?"

"Home."

"Is this all true?"

"S'elp me Ged."

"Now, I don't think your horses are able to take you."

"Why?"

"I intend to take them out and give you a new team."

"I want ter know!"

Jesse James blew a low, soft whistle.

In a moment Frank joined him.

"Frank!"

"Well?"

"Take out these tired horses."

"All right."

Jesse dismounted.

He sprang into the wagon.

"Wot yer goin' to do?"

"Keep still and all will go right."

"Why?"

"Put your hands behind you."

"Why?"

"I am going to tie them."

"I won't."

"Very well; I'll kill you then."

Again the ugly-looking revolver was placed close against his head.

"Don't shoot."

"Put your hands behind you."

"I will."

He did.

Jesse tied him and gagged him.

By the time this was done Frank James' nimble fingers had removed the harness from the horses.

He took off the saddles from Siroc and Jim Malone and threw them in the wagon and placed the harness on them.

"Well, now, Jess, what are we going to do with Tom Griggs' horses?" asked Frank.

"Turn 'em out to feed."

Frank laughed.

"They need it."

Jesse took the wagoner's whip and gave each horse a cut, and the poor animals, with their hip-bones almost starting through the skin, trotted off.

"Frank, get in."

"All right."

Frank James climbed into the wagon.

Siroc and Jim Malone were hitched to the wagon.

Jesse took the lines.

"Get up!"

The horses started.

"Frank, get back there and lie down with that fellow. Keep your revolver close to his head, and kill him if he moves."

"I will."

Frank whispered a few words to the prisoner, and Jesse, in the role of a wagoner, drove down to the bridge, where the guard of bandit hunters were waiting for the James Boys.

CHAPTER II.

JESSE JAMES' STRANGE ADVENTURE.

THE James Boys were of course running a great risk.

But as usual, when they ran great risks, the James Boys were always cool.

Jesse sat with the driver's hat and coat on, and a pair of false whiskers on his chin.

He looked like a sandy-whiskered little old man.

Driving straight to the bridge, holding back Siroc and Jim Malone.

"Whoa!" he said.

He saw two men.

They started up from the approach of the bridge.

He now saw that they were each armed with a gun.

"Halloa!" said one.

"What is that, Till?"

"Er wagon, Ches."

"Who is in it?"

"How do I know?"

"Maybe it's the James Boys."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"What you laughin' at?"

"Yon."

"Me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Do you think the James Boys go travelin' about the country in a wagon?"

"Might."

"Nonsense."

"Stop 'em."

"I can, Ches, if it'll do you any good."

"Well, you know Timberlake told us to stop everybody we saw."

"Yes."

"Here is some one."

"Halt!"

"What d'ye want?" asked Jesse James, assuming the tone and manner of a countryman.

"Who are you?"

"Tom Griggs."

"Where ar' ye goin'?"

"Home."

"Where d'ye live?"

"Lakewater Township, on ther Sorrel."

"On the Sorrel?"

"Yes. Now I want to go on an' I must," said Jesse.

"Wall, Mr. Griggs, I am sorry to tell ye ye can't."

"Who be you?"

"He is Sam Hansucker an' I'm Jim Crum."

"Wot you don' hear?"

"We belong to Timberlake's posse, and set here to watch the bridge."

"Why?"

"The James Boys are on this side."

"Then, great Scott, lemme get ou the other."

"Not so fast."

"Oh, yes"

"You must wait until Timberlake comes back."

"Whar air he?"

"Gone to the lower ford with four men to see that the James Boys don't cross there."

"I can't wait an' the Jeems Boys on this side a me," he cried. "Lemme git over on t'other side."

"We can't."

"Why?"

"You must stay until Timberlake comes back."

"Great Scott, let er feller stay on t'other side."

The two men held a short consultation, while Jesse drove his horses as close to the approach of the bridge as he could.

He seemed so much like a frightened, half-witted countryman, that one said:

"Why, no, Till, what harm can it be for him to cross?"

"Very well, then, Tom Griggs, you can drive over on the other side. But mind you, don't go any further."

"Oh, I won't. I'll unhitch from my wagon an' camp," said Jesse.

"All right."

"Kin I go on?"

"Yes."

"Don't yer p'int them blasted guns at me. I'm skeered on 'em."

The guards laughed, and Jesse drove slowly and carefully across. He turned aside into the edge of the bushes as if to camp.

"Are you goin' to stay all night?" said one of the guard.

"Yes."

"All right."

Jesse went to work at once to taking the horses out of the wagon.

In a few moments he had them out of the harness.

As he put the harness in at the front end of the wagon, the two men standing on the bridge said:

"I guess he is going to camp."

"Frank!" whispered Jesse.

"Yes."

"Have you got him tied?"

"Yes."

"Tell him we will kill him if he moves."

"Don't move," whispered Frank. "Don't try to scream for thirty minutes or we will kill you."

He could not answer.

His mouth was closely gagged.

Daring and bold was the scheme of the James Boys.

In order to make it work they had to act at once, and a moment's hesitation might ruin all.

Jesse drew out both saddles and flung them on in a moment.

The tail end of the wagon was toward the men on the bridge. He was operating at the front.

The wagon as well as some bushes were between him and the guards on the bridge.

Frank James leaped noiselessly from the wagon and buckled his saddle girth.

"What's he doin'?" said one of the guard at the bridge.

"I don't know."

"We'd better look after him."

"Hello, there's two!" cried the other, as Jesse and Frank James both leaped upon their horses.

"Halt!"

"Stop!"

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

One of the guard fell on the bridge, wounded. The other leaped behind a large beam to be out of range of the storm of bullets.

Jesse and Frank James, after emptying a revolver each at the beam of wood, filling it with bullets, wheeled their horses about and galloped away like the wind.

For the next five minutes neither of the James Boys spoke.

"Frank, didn't we play that fine?"

"Yes."

"But it's not over."

"Why?"

At this moment a shrill whistle rang out on the night air.

"What is that, Jess?"

"It's a signal call."

"For Timberlake?"

"Yes."

"He means to rally his men."

"Yes. They will soon be on us, and now, Frank, Jim Malone is in no condition to make a long run."

"You are right, Jesse."

"I believe I will draw them off after me and give you an opportunity to escape."

"Can you?"

"There is not a doubt of it," said Jesse.

"Won't you run too great a risk?"

"No."

"Jesse, Siroc must be tired."

Jesse, laughing, patted the neck of his famous steed.

"Noble Siroc, you never tire," he said with a laugh.

"No, he never does. Yet when he does give out he may go all at once."

"I hope he won't for a long while yet. Siroc is as good as a score of the country plugs which Timberlake and his myrmidons ride."

At this moment they heard a roar behind them.

"Jesse, they are coming."

"I know it. And now, Frank, you must obey me."

"I will. What is it?"

"Take the left hand road to Horace Jones; he is a friend of ours."

"I know it."

"Tell him to hide you."

"How far is it to his house?"

"It must be three or four miles at least."

"Well, you, Jesse—can you—"

"Never mind me, Frank. I can take care of myself. Don't give yourself any uneasiness on my account."

"I won't."

"Go now."

"When shall we meet?"

"I don't know. As soon as we can."

"Is there a band call?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At Hampton Wells."

"When?"

"Next Thursday."

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Frank."

They waved an adieu, and each galloped away in a different direction.

Jesse kept on the main road.

It was a hard beaten road, and the moon's rays glistened upon it as if it had been polished steel.

On reaching the top of the hill, Jesse James began to slacken his speed just a little.

The roar of hoofs could be heard coming hard after him.

Jesse James cocked his revolver.

They were coming at a tremendous gallop after him.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

He fired three shots at the posse.

A yell told he had wounded some one.

The posse came to a halt.

"Fire!"

It was Timberlake's voice which gave the command.

Jesse James knew that voice. He had heard it many a time, and it made him shudder.

A rattling crash of fire-arms, and a perfect hailstorm of bullets whizzed all about Jesse.

But neither he nor Siroc were hit.

"It's about time to get out of this," he thought.

Wheeling Siroc about he galloped away.

On came the thundering horde.

The ground quaked beneath their flying hoofs.

The dust rose in a tremendous cloud all about him.

Siroc fled at a speed which defied pursuit.

On came the host of pursuers.

"Hunt him down, kill him, don't let him escape!" yelled the enraged Timberlake.

Away they flew, but on sped Jesse James.

Ten miles and the wonderful Siroc showed no signs of slackening his speed.

This mad chase was too much for the horses of the pursuers.

It was too much for the riders as well as the horses, and Timberlake was forced to give up the chase, while Jesse laughing defiance at his pursuers galloped away.

He had thrown them off Frank's track and fully beaten them in the long flight.

Along the road he sped at a hard gallop free from any danger or annoyance.

A scorching hot day had just drawn to a close.

Evening came and dark clouds were gathering in the western horizon, portending a coming storm.

A solitary horseman, mounted on a powerful dark horse, reeking with perspiration, was riding along a lonely road through the sparsely inhabited country of Clay County, Missouri.

The houses were many miles apart, and a belated traveler ran a poor chance of getting a place to stay over night.

Although the steed the stranger rode was flecked with foam, the eagle eyes of the animal showed that the fire and spirit of the animal were not exhausted.

"Well, Siroc, my noble fellow," said Jesse James, for the solitary horseman was the bandit king of America, "we stand a good chance of passing the night in the forest and rain."

But at this moment he saw the blue smoke ascending from a house across the hills.

The sun went down amid the angry clouds, and darkness of night had overspread the scene long before he reached the house.

It was a large, old-fashioned, substantial farmhouse of full two stories in height.

It had been built long before the war when the Indians used to raid the frontier, and had been once used as a fort during the war of the Rebellion.

Jesse James saw no sign of life about the house save a big fierce dog which was chained at a goods box that served for his kennel.

"Hilloa!" he called.

There was no response.

"Hilloa!"

The dog barked.

"Hilloa!"

The front door opened and a little tow-headed boy, about six or seven years of age, in blue checked waist and brown pants coming to his knee, appeared.

"Who lives here?" asked Jesse.

The boy caught a sight of a stranger and fled into the house, squalling:

"Maw—maw, thar's some'n out thar."

"Where?"

"Gate."

A moment later a pale, overworked woman appeared at the door.

"What d'ye want?" she asked.

Jesse James had dismounted from his horse and came to the house.

"Madam, I am a belated traveler," he said.

"Oh, sir!" she gasped, alarmed, "what do you want?"

With his riding whip Jesse pointed to the gathering storm in the west.

"Don't you see those lowering clouds?"

"Yes."

"How far is it to the next house?"

"Eight miles."

"Eight miles in this storm and darkness are out of the question," he answered. "I am willing to pay you handsomely for your trouble and accommodations."

"Oh, sir, it's not that!"

"Have you the room?"

"Abundance. But my husband is not at home. He went off to town."

"When?"

"This morning."

"Won't he return to-night?"

"I don't know."

"Madam, I assure you it will make no difference," said Jesse James. "I am a gentleman and I shall behave like one. You shall be rewarded for all you have done for me."

"But I am all alone with only two children."

"I give you my word as a gentleman, madam, that neither yourself nor your children shall be harmed."

She hesitated, but the stormy night was coming on and it seemed very inhuman to turn one out in such a storm.

"You'll have to look after yer hoss," she said.

"My old man's gone and the oldest child ain't but six. I can't do it—"

"Oh, thank you," Jesse answered. "I regard that as nothing. In fact, I prefer to feed and curry my own horse."

The bandit king led Siroc to the barn.

He found a large watering trough filled with water.

He gave Siroc a drink.

There was an abundance of oats, corn and hay in the barn for his horse, and Siroc fared well.

From the saddle-pockets the bandit king drew forth a curry-comb and brush, and proceeded to curry and brush his steed until each hair was dry and glistened.

"Now, my good fellow, I don't think we need have any fears of being found here. We will pass a quiet night and resume our journey."

Jesse James little dreamed of the wild and strange adventures which awaited him during the dark hours of night.

He went to the house.

The good woman said:

"You must be hungry, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've got supper a'most ready. Set down by the winder and here's a fan to fan yer face."

She went into the kitchen.

In a few minutes she appeared and stated that supper was ready.

It was a good substantial supper and Jesse James did ample justice to it.

When he had finished he was told his bed was ready when he wished to retire.

By this time the storm had burst in all its fury.

The loud thunder roared, the wind howled furiously, beating the rain against the windows.

"I believe I will go to bed now," he said.

She gave him a candle, and pointing to the stairway, said:

"Go up to the landing and turn to the right."

He followed the direction and came to a large room, in which was a bed, a chair, an old spinning wheel and a pile of unthreshed beans.

The beans, with their shells, vines and dirt seemed as clean as the bed.

He set the candle on the end of a goods box and proceeded to turn down the dirty bed clothes.

The farmer was evidently not a tidy man.

Jesse James was tired, and despite the untidy appearance of the bed he turned in and was soon buried in sleep.

The roaring storm without actually seemed to soothe him to profound slumber.

He had slept some two or three hours when he was suddenly roused by a voice calling:

"Mister—mister, wake up—wake up! Why don't you wake up?"

Jesse started up in bed and by a flash of lightning saw before him the white face of a woman.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Sir, they are trying to rob my house."

"Who?"

"Niggers—two niggers. Have ye got pistols?"

"Yes."

"Give me one, and you take one, and let's kill 'em."

Jesse James was a man to think volumes in a second's time.

He asked:

"Have you money in the house?"

"No, it's the Zig Johnson diamonds they want."

"Diamonds!" said Jesse, producing his revolvers.

"Yes, sir!" the excited woman cried. "They bring 'em herel! They bring 'em herel! They belong to old Zig's heirs, Smith Jones and Annie Floyd. They bring 'em here and left 'em in my old man's possession, 'cause he waz honest, and no one would think o' lookin' for 'em."

"Where are the diamonds concealed?" the cunning Jesse James asked. "I must know where they are if I am to defend them."

She pointed to the small, square hole cut in the attic ceiling.

By this time they plainly heard the thunder of blows.

The robbers had procured an ax and were battering down the door.

The children awoke and began to scream.

"Come on!" cried the woman, clutching the pistol he had given her.

"Let's kill 'em!"

Crash!

Crash!

Crash!

The best door in America could not long withstand those thundering blows.

"The woman has pluck," Jesse thought, as she took the lead, cocking the pistol as she hastened down-stairs.

"How many robbers are there?" he asked.

"Two."

"Only two?"

"That's all."

"Are you quite sure?"

"I know there are but two."

Jesse James smiled.

Two negroes would be nothing for him.

He could easily shoot them both then, take the diamonds and escape.

The door fell with a crash, and the two negroes leaped into the house while they were about half way down the stairs.

The woman raised her pistol and fired at the foremost of the outlaws.

He fell without a groan.

"Well done!" cried Jesse. "A splendid shot, by zounds!"

Crack went his pistol, and the second man who had turned to fly fell.

"We've done 'em both up!" cried the woman.

"Get a candle and let us see them."

She brought a candle, and there lying on the floor were two black men both quite dead.

Jesse James said:

"These men are not negroes. Their faces are just blacked, that's all. They are disguised, that is all."

She brought a basin of water and proceeded to wash the one lying nearest the door. The one Jesse had shot.

When his face was cleansed and white, she cried:

"Why, it's Nick Carleton, our hired man."

The woman was amazed and horrified.

Jesse sprang to the man she had shot, and dipping the towel in the water quickly washed his face clean and white.

Then he tore off his wig of black lamb's wool, and asked the woman:

"Who is this?"

One glance and then an awful shriek.

"My husband! Oh, my husband, and I killed him!"

She threw herself on the dead man's breast and swooned.

"I believe I understand why this man tried to rob his own house."

"The Zig Johnson diamonds were left in his care. If his wife was robbed in his absence he would be held blameless. I will get 'em and go before she recovers."

Jesse flew like a bird up-stairs and in the attic found a mahogany box which he brought down and soon concealed in his saddle pockets.

Before the woman had recovered from her swoon he was mounted on his horse and riding away as rapidly as the animal could go.

The storm had passed away, but the ground was wet and muddy.

CHAPTER III.

CARL GREENE'S CHASE.

"Do you see that man on the street?"

"Yes."

"I mean the one entering the saloon—he that wears a white plug hat with a black band."

"I see him."

"Thar fellow is Bunco Bill."

"The great confidence man?"

"The same."

"And are you shadowing him?"

"Yes. You see, we haven't got the evidence dead sure against him, and you must lay for him until we do get the evidence sure. Then we will arrest him."

"Well, Mr. Greene, I will watch him and do the best I can. I was sent to take your place, for the man in the office is from the West and says he must see you."

"Very well. Keep your eyes on Bunco Bill."

"I will."

Then Carl Greene surrendered the case which he had almost worked to a completion, and went to the office to engage in another more important.

When he reached the office he found a young man with blond mustache and light brown hair and blue eyes. He was a nervous young fellow, with a look of anxiety about him.

"Is this Carl Greene, the famous detective?" he asked as soon as Carl entered.

"I am Carl Greene, but I am not aware of the fact that I have acquired any particular fame."

"Yet you have."

"Well, that is not business."

"No."

"You sent for me?"

"I did. I am to intrust this matter with no one but yourself."

"What have you to say?"

"Are we quite alone?"

"Certainly."

"But—"

"Never mind these clerks and others. All are connected with the business," said Carl Greene.

The cautious young man looked somewhat relieved.

"Proceed."

"Well, sir, my name is Smith Jones—John Smith Jones, though I usually go by the name of Smith Jones."

"Certainly. Well, I can easily suppose you are a namesake of the illustrious Captain John Smith."

"The founder of Virginia—he of Pocahontas fame? Yes, sir, I am his namesake."

"Very well—never mind him."

Mr. Jones, with a smile, answered:

"Oh, no; he has been dead some time."

"What is your business?"

"I am a nephew of old Zig Johnson, who died about six months ago."

"I had not the honor of his acquaintance, and, in fact, sir, I never heard of Mr. Zig Johnson until now."

"Well, he was a diamond merchant of New York—a sort of miser who had a mania for diamonds."

"Is my business with him?"

"No, he is dead."

"Well, what has he to do with it?"

"Wait until I tell you."

"You are his heir."

"I am one of his heirs."

"How many did he leave?"

"Only myself and a distant cousin named Annie Floyd who lives in Montana."

"And where do you live?"

"In Missouri—Kansas City."

"I begin to see. Where are the diamonds?"

"That's what we don't know."

"Maybe he had none?"

"Yes, he had a special friend named George Brighton who lived in Missouri, in the great Southwest, a sort of a hermit, for there was no house in miles of his house. He had a wife, Sarah Brighton, and two little children."

Carl Greene, bewildered, asked:

"What have they to do with the missing diamonds?"

"Everything."

"Go on—get to the end of your story just as soon as possible."

Being thus urged, the young fellow continued: "He had such confidence in Brighton that he brought the diamonds to him to keep. He died while in Kansas City, leaving the diamonds at Brighton's house."

"Now comes the strangest part of my story."

"One day Brighton went away, leaving his wife alone, saying he would not return until next day."

"While he was gone, just at night, a storm was coming up and so did a stranger."

"He wanted to stay all night."

"She let him?"

"Yes."

"And he stole the diamonds?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know?"

"No."

"Well, what became of them?"

"Well, let me tell you all, and then I want you to find out where those diamonds are yourself."

"Go on."

"During the night two black men came to rob the house."

"Of the diamonds?"

"Yes."

"Go on: did they?"

"No, the woman awoke the stranger, who was armed, Mrs. Brighton took one of his pistols and killed the first negro who entered; he shot the second. Then they saw they were white men blacked, and, getting water, washed their faces. The man Sarah Brighton had killed was her own husband, the other an acquaintance named Nick Carleton."

"I can see through it all. They had come to rob the house of the diamonds."

"Yes."

"But did not get them?"

"No."

"Who did?"

"The woman fainted when she learned she had shot her own husband, and when she recovered, the stranger was gone and so were the diamonds. Sarah Brighton is insane and we don't know who got the diamonds."

"What are they worth?"

"Two millions."

Carl Greene started.

"It's true, every word of it."

"Why did your uncle leave such a large sum at the farm-house?" he asked.

"Well, Uncle Zig was a crank. He used to say there was but one honest man in the world, and he was his old school-boy friend, George Brighton. And he had such implicit confidence in him he left the diamonds in his care."

"And his friend turned out after all to be a thief."

"Yes."

Then Carl Greene was silent for a few moments.

At last he asked:

"You have one-half of the diamonds?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, sir, I don't exactly understand it, but if the amount is as large you say, for fifty thousand dollars I will restore the diamonds."

"Will you?"

"Yes."

"And take the diamonds for pay?"

"For my reward I will take the diamonds. I must have my expenses."

"You shall. I've got some money. Here is five hundred dollars; when it's gone another five hundred awaits you. When will you commence?"

"At once. Go home and I will be at the Brighton house in two or three days."

"Shall I go there?"

"No. Where is Sarah Brighton?"

"At St. Joe Insane Asylum."

"That will do. Good-day."

Carl Greene arose and locked himself up in his private room, while John Smith Jones went away seriously puzzled as to the man he had employed.

"He acts very indifferent; just as though he didn't care a cent whether he did anything or not."

Just one week after that a tall, well-dressed stranger with a silk hat and cane appeared at the lunatic asylum at St. Joe. He walked up through the beautiful park and to the great front door.

Dr. Smith, the superintendent of the asylum, was sitting at his desk in his small room when the stranger entered.

"Good-morning, sir; are you the superintendent?" asked the stranger.

"I am."

"I came to consult with you in regard to a patient."

"Who?"

"Sarah Brighton."

"Wait a moment," said the superintendent. He took up a speaking tube and blew through it.

A moment later there came through it a:

"Well?"

"How is Sarah Brighton?"

"Improving rapidly," answered the nurse of the ward.

"Can she receive a visitor?"

"Yes."

"Wait a moment, doctor. I suppose you know the character of her case?"

"Certainly."

"I wish to inform you that I am a detective ferreting out the stolen diamonds and I want to talk with her on business. Is she really strong enough?"

"I will have to look after that myself," the doctor said.

He rose and went from the room.

In about half an hour he came back, saying:

"She is now in the reception room, and will see you, but I must be present and see that you do not excite her."

Carl Greene consented, and in a few moments he was in the presence of the wild-eyed patient, who sat gazing into vacancy.

Gently recalling the past, he asked her about the stranger who had called to see her.

"How large a man was he?"

"About ez big ez you," she answered.

"Would you know him if you saw him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you notice his horse?"

"A large black horse, which he had run a thousand miles. It was all covered with foam. Such eyes! like eagle's."

"The horse's eyes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he put the horse in your barn?"

"He did, and he fed, curried and rubbed the horse a long time."

"Did you notice his pistols?"

"They were large revolvers, both of them. The one I fired was so heavy I scarce could hold it. But, oh! it was the devil who steadied my hand."

"No, no, no! That blood on his breast! Oh, George! George! my murdered husband, don't look at me in that way. I—I—"

"Mr. Greene, I cannot permit this interview to continue longer," said Dr. Smith. "You have already excited the patient too much."

"I am very sorry, doctor."

"Well, she must be sent to her ward."

"I have all the information necessary."

The patient was taken away to her ward, and Carl Greene took his departure.

He was astonished to find that the sun had already set.

The asylum is about two or three miles from the town, and Carl Greene was walking along a narrow path which led to the town by the side of the road, when suddenly from a fence on his right there came the flash and sharp report of a pistol.

A ball grazed his forehead and struck the bank on the opposite side.

Quick as thought the daring detective had his revolver in his hand.

Wheeling about he caught a glimpse of a retreating form.

A tall, slender man leaped from the fence and ran across the meadow.

Carl Greene sprang up the steep bank and flew like lightning across the meadow.

It was now grown almost dark.

But he could see the form of a retreating man.

He ran—he flew.

"I have seen him before," Carl Greene said.

"He is one of the James Boys."

Carl Greene had had frequent encounters with the James Boys.

Once he had captured them, but they escaped from jail after he had turned them over.

Carl Greene had, from the description given by Mrs. Brighton of the stranger, come to the conclusion that the mysterious stranger was Jesse James.

"I can see through it all," he had just declared, when:

Whiz! went the pistol ball across his face.

Carl Greene was fleet of foot.

So was the man he was pursuing.

"Hold on, Frank James! You had just as well surrender now as at any other time."

Crack!

Frank—for it was Frank James—turned about and fired as he ran.

Bang!

Bang!

Carl Greene's bullets whizzed close enough to the fugitive's head to increase his speed and uneasiness.

"Halt!"

"Not much."

"I can overhaul you."

"We'll see."

"Frank James."

"What will you have, Carl Greene?"

"I don't wish to harm you."

"Then don't shoot any more in this direction."

"I must have you, Frank."

"You can't get me."

Frank leaped a fence.

The detective leaped after him.

They both ran as fast as they could.

A lane was beyond.

Carl Greene saw a large bay horse with a saddle on its back running loose in the lane.

The bandit leaped the hedge fence into the lane, calling:

"Jim Malone—Jim Malone!"

With a loud neigh the horse came running toward him.

He bounded at the horse and leaped on its side, clinging by one stirrup.

"Hark away!" shouted the highwayman.

Away flew the horse at full speed.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Carl Greene's pistols rang out as rapid as flashes of thought.

The bullets rung down the road.

Some struck the ground so close to the horse's

feet that they knocked the dirt up over horse and rider.

Carl Greene gave chase on foot, firing as fast as he could.

He was a swift runner, but he could not keep pace with the swift-footed Jim Malone.

CHAPTER IV.

A STORMY NIGHT.

"COME, Clell, what ails you to-night? Have ye took opium?"

"No."

"What's the matter?"

"Wot are you growlin' about, Wood Hite?"

"Yer so slow."

"Wall, wot yer want?"

"Cut for deal."

"Oh, ye want to play cards?"

"Yes."

"Then here goes! King of spades!"

"All right!"

"What have ye, Wood?"

"The deuce of hearts."

"No good!"

"Yer deal."

"I know it."

"Now, go ahead."

Cards were shuffled with nimble, skillful hands, and then like lightning flipped out to right and left, dealing to the other three.

"Clubs are trumps—wot d'yer do?"

"Pass."

They passed all round and the game went on. The scene was in a lonely house in a deep Missouri forest.

A group of wild, dangerous-looking men, eight or ten in number, were assembled in the room.

Four were playing cards, some were drinking, one was asleep on a couch and another sat in a corner smoking.

One small fellow was sawing away on an old violin.

At last the man with the fiddle stopped playing and asked loud enough to be heard by all:

"Whar is the chief?"

"Dun know."

"Say, boys, ain't no one seen Jesse nor Frank lately?"

"No."

"Wall, that beats all."

"Why?"

"He was to come here."

"When?"

"Two days ago."

"Ther ship's overdue."

"Go on. Wood Hite, what d'ye do?"

"Pass."

"I turn it down."

"I make it a heart."

"Lead out."

The small man with the fiddle sawed away a strain of "Dixie."

Then he got up.

"It ain't good, boys. Somethin's wrong."

"What d'ye mean, Jim?"

"I mean that Jesse ought to have reported sooner."

"He won't come until he gets ready."

"He won't until he can."

"Wot's ther row with Jim Cummins now I'd like to know?" cried another.

"Oh, gammon!"

There was a few moments' silence.

Suddenly a heavy peal of thunder broke on the horizon and rolled away across the heavens.

Jim Cummins again took up his fiddle and sawed away on the first half of "Dixie."

"Boys!" he suddenly bawled.

"What?"

"We'll hev a bad night."

"I spect we will."

"Do you think it'll stop his comin'?"

"Who?"

"Jesse."

"Was he comin' to-night?"

"He is due two days."

"Well, don't worry."

"Worry—fool, when you find the hangman got his rope about your neck, Wood Hite, you'll worry."

"It'll be time enough to trouble then."

"Yes, but you'd better worry a little about it before they hang you."

By this time the storm came on.

It burst with implacable fury on the scene.

The heavens seemed rent in twain by peals of thunder, the skies were painted with lurid fire.

"Boys!"

"What, Jim?"

"It's a-comin'."

"The storm?"

"Yes."

"We all know it."

Jim went to the window.

"Whew! how it blows!"

"Pull down the blind."

"I want to see the lightning."

"We don't."

"Hold on, Dick; hold on; ye can't do that," cried one of the card players.

"Wot yer mean, Wood Hite?"

"Ye know wot I mean. Ye can't put a ace in yer sleeve."

"I hain't."

"Ye hev."

"I hain't."

"Ye hev."

Dick Little started to his feet with a terrible oath.

"D'ye mean ter call me a liar?"

"Jist as ye like it."

Then followed an exciting scene.

Every bandit was on his feet in a moment.

Some were crying:

"Peace—peace! Let us hev no fightin'!"

"Peace—thunder!"

"Fair fight!"

"Don't use pistols!"

"I will!"

"So will I!"

"I'll blow his black heart out o' his body!"

"Let me hev a fair crack at 'im an' I'll shoot his eyes out o' his head!"

"Stop that!"

"I won't!"

The hubbub and uproar was now at its height. Everybody was wild with excitement. Suddenly the door burst open and two tall forms, whose garments were dripping with water, entered.

"Hold! What means this?" cried the tallest and largest of the twain.

He was Jesse James. His companion was Frank, his brother.

"What means this?" Jesse James again roared.

"Only a little fun," said one of the band.

The outlaws all had a wholesome dread of Jesse James.

Jesse was a desperate man and permitted no quarreling.

His appearance produced instantaneous silence.

"Who is it that began this quarrel?"

As Jesse asked this question in his terrible calm voice, he placed his left hand on the butt of his revolver and his right on the handle of his death-dealing bowie knife.

No one spoke.

A silence of death reigned.

To point out the disturber all felt meant bloodshed.

"I have so often forbidden your quarreling, but yet I cannot go away for a few days but that I come back and find you on the eve of battle."

His eyes flashed with fire.

"Fools—fools, have you not sense enough to keep down your tempers without my being with you?"

Jesse's eyes fell on the pack of cards and half emptied bottle of whisky on the table.

He raised his pistol, shot the bottle to a thousand pieces, and then driving his bowie knife down straight through the cards, with an appalling oath he cried:

"The next man that quarrels I will kill, so help me Heaven! I will have peace in the band so long as I am its chief."

No one as yet spoke.

"Fools—fools—you wretched, miserable fools. Don't you know that Carl Greene is in the neighborhood?"

"Carl Greene?"

"Yes."

Every man could speak now.

Carl Greene was known and dreaded by every member of the band.

Carl Greene was and always had been the evil genius of the James Boys.

"Carl Greene come to Missouri?" they asked in concert.

"Yes."

"No more rest," said one.

"No more cards."

"Nor liquor."

"I wish he was dead."

"Yes."

"I'll kill him at sight!"

"So will I!"

Jesse James heard these boastful threats, and with a smile of contempt curling his lips he cried:

"Fools, fools, the everlasting fools!"

Cole Younger said:

"Jesse, where is he?"

"I don't know now."

"Where was he last seen?"

"At St. Joe."

"Did you see him?"

"No, Frank did."

Frank James said:

"I saw him and I had a very narrow escape."

Then he recounted his terrible adventures.

When he had completed, Jim Cummins gave vent to a prolonged whistle.

"I knew it."

"Knew what, Jim?"

"I could a-gambled on it; I could a-swore it. It's just my luck."

"Jim, what do yer mean?"

"Every time I get where I think I kin hev a little ease an' peace some blasted thing turns up."

"Oh, Jim, he is not here yet."

"He will be."

"Maybe he won't."

"He will—I'd bet my head on it."

"Don't believe yer head would make a very good football, Jim."

"It's no time to joke, Wood Hite. I tell ye whenever that blasted detective, Carl Greene, is around, there ain't no time for jokin'."

Old man Hite, the owner of the house, came in the room where the outlaws were assembled.

The present rendezvous to which we have introduced the reader was the home of old man Hite, a farm-house in the forest.

The farm-house was two stories in height, and a large building with a wing; also two stories.

Jesse took Mr. Hite aside, and asked:

"Mr. Hite, who began this fuss?"

"What fuss?" asked Mr. Hite.

"There was a quarrel here when we came in. I can't find out who originated it. Now, you know I have sworn that I would kill any man who brings on a quarrel in our camp."

"Well, I wasn't in."

"If I can learn who the transgressor was, he shall die!"

"I warn't in the room. Wife an' I was off in the kitchen."

"How long have you been in there?"

"Since supper."

"Since supper?"

"Yes."

"All the time?"

"Every minute."

"You have not seen the boys?"

"No."

"Never knew of any trouble?"

"Not till I heerd yer pistol fire."

"Then you came in?"

"Not right away."

"Why not?"

"'Cos wife she wouldn't lemme come. She sed az how I might git killed. I jist waited at the door until I heerd yer voice. Then I knowed as how I could come in, because yer wouldn't lemme be hurt."

Jesse James took Jim aside and said:

"Jim, who began this quarrel?"

"Oh, Jess!"

"I want to know."

"Let 'em off this time."

"Jim, I've got to make a terrible example of some one. I've got to kill one or two in order to preserve peace."

"But, Jess, let it pass this time."

"Wasn't it Wood Hite and Dick Little at their old quarrel again?"

"Jesse, I don't want to tell and get any o' the boys in trouble."

"No, I know it was them. Now I am going to have peace if I have to kill both of them."

"Let it go this time."

A deafening peal of thunder, a blinding flash of lightning, an old oak tree but a few rods from the house was shattered from the topmost branches to the roots.

Great slabs of wood and shattered branches of trees were hurled against the fence which surrounded the Hite house.

Each bandit was on his feet.

"Boys, that was a close call," said Wood Hite.

"Yes."

"I hope it will quit."

"Ugh! I wouldn't like to be out in this storm."

"I'm glad our boys are all in."

Jim Cummins, who admired the terrible, was at the window gazing out into the darkness, when a terrible flash of lightning illuminated forest, sky and landscape.

"By jingo, boys!"

"What's the matter, Jim?" Jesse James asked.

"I see some un."

"Who?"

"Dun know."

"Did you see any one?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"On the hill."

"To the east?"

"Yes."

Jesse James now took interest in the discovery, and asked:

"Jim, was he on foot or horseback?"

"Foot."

"Coming this way?"

"Yes."

"Well, let us see if he comes."

Jesse went to the window to wait for the next flash of lightning, but none came.

For several minutes—it seemed fully half an hour—the electric fire failed and refused to illumine the sky.

Jesse James grew impatient and declared:

"It is always so. When one wants a spark of lightning one can't be had at all. I wish I had a lantern. I'd go out and hunt for the tramp."

Rap!

Rap!

Rap!

At this moment three distinct knocks came on the door.

Jesse James started up and took a step toward the door.

In a moment every one of the band was on his feet and had drawn a revolver or knife.

"Boys," said Jesse, in a low tone, "put up those. This may be only an honest traveler and we should not harm him until we know who and what he is."

In a moment every pistol was returned and knife disappeared.

As no one approached the door, the caller, evidently becoming more impatient, again demanded admittance.

Rap!

Rap!

Rap!

Jesse turned his eyes on Mr. Hite and nodded.

The old man who was the host went to the door and opened it.

A miserable-looking man wearing a rubber coat stood at the door.

"I beg pardon, sir, but it's stormy," he said, entering the house.

He paused near the door, which Mr. Hite closed, and gazed around on the ill-looking men assembled.

Perhaps a more unprepossessing band of men were never seen than those in the old house.

The stranger was silent for several moments, then he said:

"It's stormy out."

"I should think so," Jesse answered.

The water ran off the stranger at the door until it lay in a circling puddle all about him.

"I—I don't mean any intrusion, gentlemen, but it's raining out there," stammered the stranger.

"Where are you going?" Jesse James asked.

"To Independence."

"Where are you from?"

"Springfield."

"Missouri?"

"No."

"At Illinois?"

"No."

"Where?"

"Ohio."

"Springfield, Ohio?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you are a long way from home!"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you ever in this country before?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you well acquainted in Missouri?"

"No, sir."

"Have you ever been in this part before?"

The stranger shook his head, and answered:

"No, I'm lost. Kin I stay all night?"

Mr. Hite gave Jesse James a glance, and the bandit king nodded for him to consent.

"I reckon you can stay."

He gazed about on the forbidding-looking men in the apartment.

"These are only some tie makers who board here," said Jesse.

A shrewd man would only have to glance at their soft white hands to know this was false.

Those men never wielded an ax.

Mr. Hite pointed to a chair near the fire-place, and told the man to sit.

He did so.

At this Wood Hite plucked Cole Younger aside, and said:

"He's got money about him."

Meanwhile the stranger sat before the fire-place gazing at the smoldering fire.

CHAPTER V.

CARL A CAPTIVE.

"Do ye want supper?" asked old man Hite.

The new-comer started up and said:

"Eh?"

"Do you want supper?"

This last was in a louder key.

"Yes."

"Come in."

He beckoned the stranger to follow him.

The old man, for he was an old man, picked up a small leather traveling bag which he carried with him and followed the host.

No sooner had he gone than the James Boys' band began to exchange glances.

Jim Cummins, who was the most talkative of any, said:

"Boys, he's worth pickin'."

"How d'yo know, Jim?"

"Because. Didn't ye see the bag?"

"Yes."

"I saw it."

"I heard it."

"What did ye hear, Bob Ford?"

"I heered it chink."

"When?"

"When he set it down."

"He'll never get away, boys," declared Wood Hite.

"Won't he?"

"No. There's more'n one grave in the garden already."

"I know it."

"There'll be another grassy mound added to the list."

Cole Younger, who had been smoking his pipe near the fire-place, said:

"He may not be worth it."

"But he is."

"How do you know, Bob Ford?"

"I tell ye I heered it chink."

"The leather bag?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do?"

Jesse James asked this question as Bob Ford took out his pistol and began examining it.

"I am goin' to pop him over, Jess."

"Who?"

"The stranger."

"When?"

"Now."

"Put it up."

"What?"

"Put up that pistol."

"Why, ye don't mean to let him go?"

"Perhaps."

"Why it's a bloody shame and agin our rules."

"It's against our rules for you to disobey your chief."

"Yes, I know—"

"Put up that revolver."

Bob did so.

After a moment's hesitation, Bob Ford again broke out with:

"Jesse, ye ain't a-goin' to let him go?"

"I may."

"What?"

"I may."

"Why, when he's got a bag of gold."

"You don't know that the leather traveling bag is full of gold."

"Yes, but it is."

"How do you know?"

"I heered it chink."

Jesse laughed.

"Boys, you must leave this case with me."

"Do you know him, Jesse?"

"I think I do," the bandit king answered.

"Now all of you turn in and go to sleep. If I want you I will call you."

There was a strange gleam in Jesse's eyes, which every man in the band very well knew meant death and danger. It was a cold, steely look, and was never seen save when he had some deadly purpose in view.

Jesse rose and took Frank into another room.

"Frank, do you know him?"

"The stranger?"

"Yes."

"I believe I do."

"Who is he?"

"Well, I should say he was Carl Greene."

"You are right."

"Are you sure, Jesse?"

"I think I am. His disguise is quite complete, but it is not sufficient to deceive me quite."

"Well, Jess—"

"What, Frank?"

"Why didn't you let Jim kill him?"

Jesse shook his head.

"You act strange."

"Frank!"

"What?"

"None of the band, save yourself, knows aught of the old Zig Johnson diamonds."

"That's so."

"Have you been careful to tell no one?"

"I have told no one."

"If the band knew we had those diamonds they would demand their share."

"Of course."

"And we must not let them know of them."

"That is all true, Jesse James; but I can't see why you should object to this common enemy being killed by Bob Ford."

"You can't?"

"No."

"I can."

"Why?"

"If he is Carl Greene I want him made a prisoner, and on the rack I will torture from him a secret that is vital to us in this case."

"A secret?"

"Yes—one on which our future happiness depends."

"Jesse, you talk so strangely I don't understand you."

"Well, Frank, I will explain," said Jesse.

"You know that you have sworn to give Carl Greene no quarter?"

"I have not forgotten that; but then you must admit that circumstances alters cases."

"I want to know first what Carl Greene's mission is here."

"To capture the James Boys of course," declared Frank.

"Yes, nothing else ever brings him here. But there is another point to know."

"What?"

"Who sent him?"

"What difference will it make?"

"Much, Frank."

"I still don't understand."

"Well, if we are suspected of having those diamonds we can never use them. If we are not suspected we can buy our liberty with them and become respected and dearly beloved citizens."

"I can fulfill my ambition and go to Congress, and you can become a minister or any other honorable calling you choose."

"It all depends on money."

"I know it."

"Now if it is suspected we have these diamonds we could never dispose of one of them."

"No."

"We'd be arrested."

"Of course."

"Well, I'll make Carl Greene tell me who sent him here, or I'll kill him."

Frank thought they could make him tell.

After a few moments' silence Frank said:

"Jesse!"

"Well?"

"Are you quite certain?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"First, the man is disguised; that I know."

"Quite sure?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"His wig was shifted."

"Are you quite sure?"

"I am."

"Well, ten to one it's Carl."

"Yes."

"But we must not stay here too long. It will excite suspicion."

"Yes."

The James Boys went from the room and found the stranger just returned from the dining-room.

The other members of the band had been discussing the stranger, and Wood Hite resolved to go that night, cut his throat and rob him.

But Wood Hite had kept his intentions to himself.

To inform any one would be to share plunder with them, and this Wood Hite had no intention of doing.

"I can kill him, put him in the graveyard in the garden, and there will be no more of him," Wood Hite thought. "No one will know but that he escaped during the night."

On entering the main room, the stranger again sat down before the fire.

He was very quiet.

The traveler never spoke unless some one addressed a word to him, or save when spoken to.

"Do ye want ter go ter bed?" asked old man Hite.

"Eh?"

"Yer hard o' hearin', ain't ye?"

"Eh?"

"Deaf?"

"Yes, oh, yes, a little."

"Thought so."

"Did you speak to me?"

"Yes."

"What did ye say?"

"D'ye want ter go ter bed?"

"Oh, yes, yes, any time that will suit ye."

"Well, yer bed's ready."

"Eh?"

"Yer bed's ready."

"Oh, yes, yes, I am ready."

"Come on."

"Eh?"

"Come on!" bawled the enraged Mr. Hite.

The traveler picked up his valise, an old leather concern, and followed Mr. Hite upstairs.

Every eye in the room watched him as he ascended to the stairway above, and nearly every hand had a different motive.

Jesse James turned aside, muttering under his breath:

"The poor fool! He has run his neck into the halter, sure enough."

He went to the far corner of the room and sat down.

The stranger was shown to a small apartment up-stairs, in which was a bed, a chair, two boxes, an old mirror, and a broken lamp.

"Here ye kin stay."

"Thank ye—thank ye," the stranger said, bowing.

In a moment more he was alone.

An instantaneous change came over him.

He went to the door and securely bolted it.

"In the den!" he muttered. "Yes, I am in the den."

Then he partially removed the disguise.

Jesse and Frank James had guessed aright.

It was Carl Greene.

Carefully closing every avenue by which the robbers could see him, he sat down and began to examine his revolvers.

"Jesse James, you have been tracked to your den—but it is not my intention now that I have you tracked to arrest you.

"This is your den, and in this old house you must have the jewels concealed."

Carl Greene was playing the most desperate game of his life.

He blew out the candle and went to bed.

It was not his intention to commence operations until midnight when all should be buried in slumber.

His bag of burglar's tools and his dark lantern were at his side, ready to be seized on when the time came.

He was almost asleep when he thought he heard something move or slide, and the next moment something very much like a flash of lightning illuminated the room.

He was not quite sure that he heard what he thought he had heard, or that the flash was real.

Really it was a sliding panel in the wall that moved, and Jesse James flashed his dark lantern on the scene.

He had not long been in bed after this, when the famous detective heard the old clock downstairs strike twelve.

"It's time to work," he thought.

The detective rose and pulled on his boots with a pair of wool soles over them.

He turned on his dark lantern and gave a glance all around.

Jesse James was at this moment creeping up the stairs barefooted.

Another man had started for the stranger's room.

It was Wood Hite.

Carl Greene, with his bag of tools, a stout cord and hook, his lantern and revolvers, opened the door.

Carl moved carefully and cautiously.

The cat gliding upon the mouse or the bird flying through the air makes no more noise than Carl Greene.

Equally as noiseless as he crept both Jesse and Wood Hite.

Carl Greene passed from the room and carefully closed and locked the door.

He was now in a long and narrow hallway.

He went to the far end of the hall and saw a square trap-door opening into the attic.

He had made up his mind that the diamonds which had been taken by Jesse James from the Brighton house had been concealed in this very attic.

"I will look into it first."

But it was folly nine feet to the trap-door, and there was no ladder or means by which he could get up to it.

But Carl Greene's grab-hook was an invention of his own, which has never been given to the public.

He could toss it upward, stick it to a ceiling overhead, and drag himself up by it.

He began to climb up his rope and opened the trap-door.

He crawled into it and threw the rays of his lantern about over the scene.

Nowhere could he discover anything that might possibly resemble a case of jewels.

Meanwhile, Wood Hite and Jesse James were both making their way to the sliding panel.

Wood Hite gained the sliding panel first.

He opened it and glided through so noiselessly that Jesse who was but a few paces away did not hear him.

Jesse gained the panel and entered.

Both outlaws turned on the light of their dark lanterns at once.

The bandit king gave vent to an expression of rage and astonishment.

A double surprise was in store for him.

He was surprised to find Wood Hite in the apartment, and his surprise was still greater to find the man he came to capture gone.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

Wood Hite was silent.

"Scoundrel, you came to betray us!"

Wood Hite was a man of high temper.

"Didn't you come to rob him and cheat the band?"

"Fool, he has no gold."

"Bob heard it chink."

"Bob is a fool, and so are you to believe him."

Jesse spoke in a low tone, and his whole frame trembled with rage.

Wood Hite knew full well how dangerous he was.

"Wood Hite, I have a great mind to kill you!"

"Why did you come?"

"To arrest him."

"He is gone."

"Yes, you—you blundering fool, you have done it!"

"Who is he?"

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"If you were not an idiot—a consummate fool—you would know him. Oh, you wretch, you idiot!"

"Who is he?"

"Carl Greene."

"The detective?"

"Yes."

Wood Hite's rage changed its course. He uttered no loud complaint, but within he was like a smoldering volcano, ready at any moment to explode.

"Don't stand there whimpering like a fool," said Jesse in a whisper. "Come, let us go and search for him."

"Lead on."

"He went out of this door."

Carl Greene was still in the attic when the outlaws entered the hall.

They flashed their lanterns up and down the hall without getting a single view of the fugitive.

Carl was still searching the attic.

He had taken the wise precaution to close down the trap-door and had withdrawn his cord and clamp hook into the attic, so there was not a trace of him.

Suddenly, while he was still busy searching for the diamonds, he was startled by hearing footsteps in the hallway below.

He bent his ear close to the crack and listened.

"D'ye see him?"

"No."

"Where can he be?"

"I don't know."

"Maybe he escaped from the house."

"Impossible!"

"Jesse!"

"What?"

"Maybe ye are mistaken."

"I am not."

"Sure it was Carl Greene?"

"Silence, fool!"

"Whist!"

"Do you hear him?"

"No, didn't you?"

"No, but he will hear you."

"I don't believe it was Carl Greene."

"Why?"

"What would he come here for?"

"To catch greenhorns like you."

To this Wood Hite sarcastically answered:

"But he would not risk his neck with such Solomons as you."

"Keep a sharp lookout, Wood Hite. If you make another blunder it will be your last."

"Where are you going?"

"Below."

Jesse went down, leaving Wood Hite alone in the hall.

Carl Greene knew now from the conversation he had overheard that he was recognized by the James Boys.

"I am in a close box," he thought.

His first plan was to burst off some of the outside boards and escape from the house.

But this he found was utterly impossible to do.

There was no window in the attic, even in the gable part of it, and he had to go back through the trap.

There was a big, stout robber on guard.

Not only was there a guard waiting for him, but he had a score or more below to come to his aid if need be.

Carl listened to Wood Hite, who was grumbling to himself.

"Jesse James, I have borne with your insolence long enough, and I won't endure ye much longer," hissed Wood Hite, through his teeth.

Suddenly Jesse was heard below talking to some one.

The storm had suddenly abated.

Violent storms usually terminate suddenly.

The thunder rolled away in the distance and the wind ceased to blow.

"Wonder what Jesse wants of me?" Wood Hite suddenly said.

Carl Greene had not heard Jesse calling him yet.

But now that he listened he distinctly heard his voice.

"Wood Hite!"

"Yes?"

"Come down."

"Yer found him?"

"We are surrounding the cellar."

"O' course. Why didn't the fools think o' searchin' in the cellar at first?" said Wood Hite as he hastened out of the hallway down the stairway.

"I am very much obliged to you," thought Carl Greene.

He turned off his light and raised the trap-door.

Then holding on to the sides of the attic floor with his hands, he lowered his body down into the hallway below.

His toes could not reach the floor, but he knew he would not have but a few inches to fall, for Carl Greene was a tall man.

At last he released his hold to drop silently to the floor.

What was his amazement to be caught around the arms and waist by two strong men.

"That will do, Carl; you will not be hurt," said Jesse James, ironically. "I have been waiting to break your fall."

All about the detective there rose a loud laugh.

Carl Greene made a tremendous leap to break away from his captors, but all in vain.

He was held a prisoner.

CHAPTER VI.

TIPPLING AT THE TAVERN.

"Now, won't you give up?"

Carl Greene said nothing, but lay on his back where he had been thrown and panted for breath.

"I hope you see the folly of trying to escape."

The captured detective was silent.

"I think we will make it interestin' for you," declared Wood Hite.

"Yes, let's string him up right away, Jesse."

"Come—come, don't be in too great a hurry."

"What?"

"I say don't hurry matters," growled Jesse James.

Everybody was amazed to find Jesse James, who was usually so blood-thirsty and determined, hesitating about taking the life of the man whom he hated above all other men.

"Ain't ye goin' to kill him, Jesse?"

"Not now."

"Not now?"

"Maybe not at all."

There was a look of amazement on the faces of all.

"What do you mean?"

Jesse James drew himself proudly up to his full height, and glaring about on the men around him, cried:

"Who commands here?"

All were silent.

"As long as I am commander, I will command. Now take him to the next room. I am going to talk with him."

Wood Hite and another outlaw conducted the captive detective to the apartment which for the present was to be his prison.

Carl Greene's hands were securely tied, and escape was next to impossible.

"Yer needn't think yer goin' ter make yer escape," said one of the hideous robbers. "Even of Jesse James does say let ye go, some o' ther boys'll stick a knife in yer an' ye'll see it."

Carl Greene made no answer.

To speak would do him no good, so he kept his silence.

He was left alone in this apartment but a few moments, when the door opened and Jesse entered.

He placed a lighted lamp on the mantel and carefully closed the door.

"Carl Greene," said the bandit king, seating himself near him, "you are in a bad fix."

"I think you are right. I am certainly in bad company."

"Yes."

"Well, what have you to say?"

"Much."

"I don't see that it is necessary. Why delay in your purpose?"

"What purpose?"

"My memory is not so short that I have forgotten Wicher, and others who have fallen into your hands."

"Well, I suppose not."

"I don't think your love for me would specially spare me."

"You are not a fool, Carl Greene."

"Thank you, Jesse James."

"I will not pretend to say that I have any special desire to save you from love."

"What personal motive could you have?"

"Self interest."

"What is it?"

Jesse James rose carefully, opened the door and looked out into the hall to see if any one was eavesdropping.

Coming back to the captive he said:

"Carl."

"Well?"

"Do you know that I have a desire to quit this business?"

"Have you?"

"Yes."

"It's a good resolution."

"But, Carl, I must retire well heeled. You know what I mean."

"I think I understand you."

"Of course."

"Well, go on. You don't expect me to keep you, do you?"

"No."

"What do you want?"

"Well, I want to be let alone."

With a shrug of the shoulders Carl Greene answered:

"I am not very apt to injure you while I am here in this fix."

"No."

"Well, what else have you to say?"

"I want to ask you some questions."

"Go on."

"Well, to begin with, how long have you been in Missouri?"

"But a few days."

"How many?"

"Five."

"Where did you come from?"

"Chicago."

"When did you leave there?"

"Six days ago."

"Are you with Allan Pinkerton?"

"No—I dissolved partnership with him some time ago."

"And you go it alone?"

"Yes."

"I am glad you did," said Jesse James. "I don't like old Pinkerton."

"No, I suppose not."

"He has caused me much trouble."

"Yes, I suppose so. I have not been particularly peaceful to you."

"No; but, Carl, it wasn't Pinkerton that sent you this time."

"No."

"Who was it?"

"Jesse, I never betray my clients."

"You must this time."

"I cannot."

"Oh, yes, you can."

"But I won't."

"Now, Carl Greene, consider. You are in the power of the James Boys."

"I know it."

"They want your life."

"I believe that."

"There is nothing to hinder them from hanging you."

"No."

"Save myself."

"Your great love will not shield me."

"Carl, be sensible."

"Well, I will."

"Why did you come to Missouri?"

"On business."

"But who sent you?"

"I sent myself."

"Why did you come?"

"To capture the James Boys."

"Why?"

"Well, there is a reward for you."

"Carl Greene."

"Well?"

"You are not telling all."

"Well, what do you want me to tell?"

"I want to know in whose particular employ you are."

"That I can't tell."

"Why?"

"It is a professional secret."

Jesse was silent for a moment.

"Carl," he said.

"Well?"

"Do you want to die?"

"No, I'd rather live."

"Would you?"

"Yes."

"Most people would."

"But, Carl, you must tell me in whose employ you are."

"That secret I cannot reveal."

"Not even to save your life?"

"No."

"Well, then, I shall turn 'em loose on you."

"I can't help it."

"Carl, what does the Bible say?"

"A great many things, Jesse."

"Don't it say all that a man hath he will give for his life?"

The writer was not contemplating Carl Greene at that time.

"Carl, you shall die unless you answer."

"Then I will die."

"I will give you an hour to think on it."

"You need not give me ten minutes."

"Why?"

"My mind is already made up."

Jesse James' face grew dark as a thunder cloud.

He leaped to his feet.

His right hand grasped his revolver, and he hissed:

"I can do it now as well as at any time."

Carl was silent.

Jesse put up his pistol, and seizing the lamp, said, in a low, hissing voice:

"Don't dream you will get off without telling me. I will torture you until I get the whole truth from you."

Jesse James left him in the dark.

Low, angry voices could be heard below.

For a long time they seemed in a wrangle.

Carl Greene tried to burst the bonds which held his wrists asunder.

But that was impossible.

He had almost given himself up for lost.

Suddenly he heard a light footfall.

Then a distinct:

"Whist!"

What did it mean?

The clouds had cleared away and through the window came the faint glow of the stars.

They dimly lighted the room.

Carl Greene saw the faint outline of a form.

It was the form of a woman.

She came in at the door, her finger on her lips.

"Whist!" she said again.

"Who are you?"

"Whist!"

She came to his side and bent over him.

"Do you want to live?"

"Yes."

"I will save you."

She bent over him and in a moment untied his hands and his feet.

"Rise."

He did so.

Then she threw up the window.

He went to it to leap out.

But she laid her hand on his arm and detained him.

"Don't do it!"

"Why?" he asked.

"If you should they would see you, and you would be arrested."

"How am I to escape?"

"Follow me."

"Lead the way."

"Come on."

She went to the wall and pressed a button.

A panel slid upward.

There was a dark space beyond. It might be a passage or a wall.

"Come!"

She disappeared in the darkness.

He followed.

"Stoop!"

He did so.

And then she took his hand.

Carl Greene was in a dark, narrow, secret

passage with which the Hite house abounded. Down this passage she lead him by the hand.

The passage was carpeted or covered with some soft substance so that their feet made no sound.

Carl Greene soon found himself in a garden.

The pale light of the stars fell on the face of his companion, and he saw that she was both young and beautiful.

She pointed to an open gate.

"Do you see it?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Go."

"One word."

"What?"

"Who are you?"

"Clara Hite."

"Are you old man Hite's young wife?"

"Yes."

Then the moon which began leaping over the hills fell on the face of Clara Hite.

It was a very pretty face.

She was not over twenty-two or three years of age, and her large blue eyes and golden hair would have adorned a belle.

"How long have you lived here?" Carl Greene asked.

"Three years," she answered.

"Do you enjoy this life?"

A hard look came over the pretty face, and she answered:

"I detest it."

"You have seen some terrible sights."

"Yes."

"Would you care to tell me?"

"I cannot now."

"Can I see you again?"

"Do you want to?"

"Yes."

"You can—but not here."

"Where?"

She reflected a moment, with her beautiful eyes on the ground.

At last she raised them, while a sweet smile came over her face, and she answered:

"Miller's Tavern."

"Miller's Tavern—where is it?"

"On the north side of Big Blue—ten miles east of Independence. It is a roadside inn."

"Do you often go there?"

"Yes."

"When can I see you there?"

Clara Hite reflected but a moment and said:

"Three nights hence."

"I shall depend on you, Clara."

"I will come without fail," she answered.

"Do so."

"Now you must go. Every moment you delay increases your danger. Go! It's not often Clara Hite cares to save a man. She has seen many killed; but when she does attempt to save one she will do it at all hazards."

Already the outlaws had discovered Carl Greene's escape.

Wild yells rose up on every side.

"He's gone!"

"Escaped!"

"Run away!"

These cries tended to hasten Carl Greene's departure.

And when he heard Jesse James crying:

"Look out for him! Hunt him down! Kill him at sight!" the cries tended to greatly accelerate his speed.

Three nights later, Carl Greene, disguised as a country boy seeking work, strolled into Miller's Tavern.

"Good-evenin'," he said, removing his stick and valise from his shoulder.

"Come in," growled Miller.

"Got any o' them thar things wot yer call oysters?" asked the green-looking countryman.

"Yes."

"I'd like ter hev some ef yer hev."

"Fried, stewed, baked or raw?"

"Gin 'em ter me fried."

"Got any money?"

"Bet yer life."

In went his hand in his pocket and pulled out a purse, which he held up.

"Want any?"

"Not now."

The landlord

yelled:

"One fry!"

"One fry!"

Then the

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Scarce

up to the

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His m

like pearl, and his golden hair, which was gathered up under his cap, was curly.

His face was almost feminine.

"Hello, youngster, whar yer goin'?" asked Miller, gruffly.

"I am going to sit down," he answered.

As soon as the boy spoke, Carl Greene recognized him.

It was Clara Knight.

"Did ye come here?"

"How else do you suppose I got here?"

"See here, lad, yer a bit too fresh."

"Well, go on—say what you want to."

"I don't want to say anything."

"All right, old Miller. Keep your chops closed, for you look handsome."

"Dang me, but the boy's smart as a whip."

The lad sat down and crossed his legs.

"Say, landlord."

"Well?"

"Can you have my horso fed?"

"Yes."

"Do it, then."

"What do you want him to have?"

"Plenty of oats, corn, hay, bran, barley, water, carrots and—let me see. I guess you can give him a handful of salt and that will do."

"By gracious! I'd think that would do."

The young fellow crossed his legs, thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his vest and leaned back.

"Well, old man?"

"Don't call me old."

"Will my order be filled?"

"Do ye want yer boss to have all that?"

"Yes. Go and attend to it. There's a dollar."

And with the ease and carelessness of a millionaire he flipped a silver dollar from his vest pocket to the landlord.

Old Miller was a sordid man.

He loved money, and when he heard that dollar ring on the floor he snatched it up in a trice.

"There's more money. Now get."

He got out in a hurry and saw the horse.

Carl Greene wrote on a slip of paper:

"I NO U."

He tossed it toward the boy.

Taking it up, the new-comer read it.

In a moment he was near the detective.

"I did not recognize you," she said, for it was Clara.

"Clara, don't you run a great risk?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Why do you?"

"I do it for you," she answered.

"For me?"

"Yes—I came to warn you to fly."

"Are they near?"

"They are coming here."

"When?"

"To-night."

"This night?"

"This very hour."

Carl Greene, with a smile, said:

"I will wait for them."

"Oh, don't—it will be death!"

"Do they suspect I am here?"

"No."

"Then they will not recognize me."

"Oh, yes, they will."

"Why do you think so?"

"Jesse James is capable of reading any disguise."

"Will he read yours?"

"No."

"I did."

"You were expecting me."

"He will not be suspecting me."

"He always expects you."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, Jesse James and his brother Frank are always on the lookout for some of Pinkerton's detectives. I don't want them to harm you."

"Ordinarily I care very little how many throats the James Boys cut, but I don't want—I can't bear to have them hurt you."

"Clara, I have been exposed to dangers all my life."

"Not such as this."

"I have long fought the James Boys."

"Alone and single-handed?"

"Yes."

"All at once?"

"The whole band."

"But surely you would not fight the band now—and here?"

"Not unless driven to it."

"They are coming."

"When?"

"They are here," she answered, as the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard all about the house.

A dozen men dismounted and came to the door.

"Too late—too late!" almost sobbed Clara.

"Have no fears. I am sorry they came, Clara Hite, for I wanted to talk with you."

"You shall have a chance yet."

"Be very brave, now, and trust all to me."

"I will."

"You don't suppose your husband is among them?"

"No."

"I am glad."

"Why?"

"I would not want to kill him for your sake."

"Don't spare him for my sake. I don't care for him."

The James Boys came pouring into the bar-room, with Jesse at their head.

"Miller—here, Miller?" bawled Jesse.

"Well, what yer want?"

"Whisky!"

"Can't yer be civil when we have company?"

Jesse James turned his eyes upon the two youngsters in a far corner.

Jesse who had two or three drinks too many, burst into a loud laugh.

"Hellca! By jingo, boys, there are the babes in the woods. Say, can't ye give 'em some crackers and milk?"

Several of the outlaws roared with laughter at this.

"Come, come, Jess, let up," whispered Frank.

"Remember where you are."

"Whisky! Good Lord! Cuss you, whisky for the band!"

"Jess, you forget—" began Frank.

"Set down and shut up!" thundered Jesse.

The outlaws hunted tables and sat down.

Soon old Miller produced glasses and a bottle of whisky.

"Everybody fill up!" cried Jesse; "we'll all twig it."

Glasses were filled.

The tippling commenced, and the youngsters in the far corner of the room watched them with no small interest.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAIN.

"JESSE—Jesse!" said Frank James.

"What do you want?"

"Hold up! Don't drink any more."

"I won't quit until I get enough. I am going to have my fill."

"We are not alone."

"Shut up! Boys, do you know I've a great mind to try another train."

"Jesse!"

"Hush! Funds are low."

"Jess!"

"Silence! We've got to raise a stake. And now I say let us rob a train. Won't you all vote for it?"

"I tell you, Jesse, we are not alone."

Jesse James, his face in flame with rage and liquor, cried:

"I am going to be chief here while I rule!"

"We are not alone."

"What do I care for a pair o' kids?"

Carl Greene at this point, assuming the voice of a boy who was half dead with terror, said:

"I beg parding, but if we be in your way, we'll go out an' leave yer alone."

"Well, go!"

"All right! I don't want no trouble."

"Git!"

As Carl Greene and the disguised Clara left the house Jesse said:

"Now to robbing this train!"

"Wait till they are gone."

"When shall we do it?"

"Right soon."

"In three days?"

"Yes."

Carl Greene and Clara went out of the house and walked slowly down the road.

Clara said:

"Do you know where the Dover school-house is?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's nearly dark. If you will go through the nigher way, I'll mount my horse and go around the road and meet you there."

"All right."

Carl Greene took a near path through the woods and hastened along through the constantly increasing gloom.

He examined his revolvers as he hastened along.

"Every cylinder loaded. I may have occasion to use them yet. This woman Clara Hite is a mystery. I wonder why she married that old man, old enough to be her grandfather?"

He reached the Dover school-house.

It stood on a hill.

On the south side was a ravine and hill beyond, all densely covered with woods and forests.

He sat down on a stump near the house and waited.

Carl Greene had not long to wait.

Soon the clatter of horses' hoofs rang on his ears, and he saw Clara Hite, disguised as a boy, coming galloping up towards him at full speed.

"You are here," she said, leaping from her horse and throwing herself on the ground at his side.

"Yes."

"Well, do you want to talk more with me?"

"Clara, I have not time now to discuss the subject as I would like, but at some future time I will. I have a request to make of you."

"What is it?"

"The James Boys are not joking about robbing that train."

"I am fully aware of that," she made answer.

"Can you ascertain what train they intend robbing?"

"Yes."

"And when?"

"Yes."

"Will you ascertain for me?"

"I will."

"And let me know?"

"Anything I can do to aid you, Mr. Greene, I will cheerfully do."

"I am happy to know I have such a faithful ally, but we must not talk further now, Clara. When and where will you let me know?"

She studied a moment, and then said:

"Day after to-morrow at the Lone Lake post-office. There is a big white stump just one hundred paces from the railroad tank, and in the hollow of that stump will be a letter addressed to—"

"John Anderson," laughed Carl.

"All right."

"Just give the day, hour and railroad, with place."

"Yes."

"Good-night, Clara."

"Are you going?"

"Yes."

"When do you want to see me again?"

"Clara!"

"Well?"

"You are a brave woman."

"Thank you."

"Can't you be on the train?"

"What train?"

"The one that is robbed."

She studied a moment and said:

"Will you be there?"

"Yes."

"So will I."

"Good!"

Then he left her.

Clara sat for a moment on a log, her horse feeding by her side. An expression of sadness was on her face.

Then she said:

"Well, who cares?"

She sprang to her feet, and leaped in the saddle.

Away she flew at the top of her horse's speed.

Carl Greene now went to a little town near, called Merceyville, and ordering a room at the only hotel, went to bed.

At the appointed time he called at the stump, which was to serve them as their post-office.

Carl carefully reconnoitered the premises as he went along, to see that no one was watching him.

Not a soul was in sight save a negro girl, who was going slowly up the railroad track.

As for the town of Lone Lake, it consisted of merely one house and a water tank.

Carl reached the stump, and thrusting his hand into the hollow, pulled out a letter addressed to John Anderson.

Walking down the railroad track, he broke the seal and read:

"September 4—Q., M. & P. R. R.—midnight—Tolona. C."

"Good!" cried Carl.

"Had she taken a whole volume to have described it to me she could not have better informed me than this."

Carl Greene began at once to prepare for the occasion.

He went to St. Louis.

There were some men there whom he knew could be relied on.

Herman Yost, Captain Jager, Newt Williams, Buckhawson and others who had seen service as deputy United States marshals and detectives were engaged to accompany him.

On the night in question the train which the

James Boys had decided to rob rolled out with a dozen well-armed men aboard.

Jesse James have a care.

A trap has been set for you and you are likely to fall into it.

Jesse had six raw recruits in his band.

His long series of successes had inspired many talented young men in Missouri to emulate him.

Some had come to study for the profession under the skilled outlaw.

Jesse's veterans of course would be depended on, but these raw recruits, whom he called the militia, might run.

His band numbered just twenty-three when they rode forth to attack the Quincy, Missouri and Pacific train.

Carl Greene had not long been on the train when he discovered a young woman wearing a white veil over her face.

She was seated at the rear of the coach.

He went near her and said:

"Clara."

"I did not know you," she returned. "You are disguised."

"Yes."

"You look horrid in that old gray wig and coat."

"We have to fix up in odd shapes sometimes."

She made room for him at her side.

"Do you think we will meet them to-night?"

"Yes."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure."

Then she was silent.

After a few moments she asked:

"Will you fight?"

"Certainly."

She shuddered.

"Are you afraid?" he asked.

"I ought not to be. I have been in many fights. I have seen men fall and blood run, but I never cared then."

Then they rode on in silence.

Carl Greene asked:

"How long have you known the James Boys?"

"Three or four years."

"Your story must be a strange one."

"It is."

"I would be glad to hear it some time."

"I tell it to but few."

"But you will tell me?"

"Yes."

At this moment the train whistled.

The door opened, and a brakeman entered.

"Callington!" he cried.

"Callington!" muttered Carl Greene, consulting his watch. "It is ten o'clock."

"Ten?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's sixty miles to the place, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Thirty miles an hour."

"It is all this train makes."

After a few moments she said:

"How slow compared to the trains in the East."

He looked at her in surprise, and said:

"Have you been in the East?"

"Yes, sir."

"What part?"

"All over it."

"Are you a native of the East?"

"I am a New York girl."

"The city or State?"

"City."

Carl Greene was surprised.

She laughed, and said:

"I have a wild, strange story to tell you whenever you are ready to hear it."

Carl Greene at this moment was more anxious to learn something about the diamonds.

So he said:

"Clara, we will talk all that over when we have time. For the present I want to interrogate you in regard to another matter."

"What?"

"Jesse James."

"Well?"

"Did you ever know Sarah Brighton?"

"No."

"Hear of her?"

"No."

"Did you ever hear of Zig Johnson?"

"No."

Carl Greene felt that his investigation was going to fail him.

"Don't you know nothing of the old Zig Johnson diamonds?"

"I never heard of them."

"Well, that is strange."

"Why?"

"Jesse James has them."

"How did he get them?"

Carl Greene hesitated for a moment about telling all he knew, and then he determined to proceed carefully in the matter.

"Did you never hear of the Brighton tragedy?"

"No."

"Haven't you read of it?"

"Living a secluded life, as I have for years, Mr. Greene, I seldom read a newspaper."

"I suppose not."

"And I assure you that I have heard nothing of the tragedy of which you speak."

Then Carl Greene said:

"Clara, I've determined to break over my established rules and intrust you with a secret."

"Do not do it unless you want to—I will not insist."

"For that very reason I intend to trust you."

"But you know they say a woman cannot keep a secret."

"Some can."

"If you are determined to tell me, I cannot prevent you," she said.

Carl Greene then told the story of the Brighton tragedy, and how the diamonds of old Zig Johnson had so mysteriously disappeared.

When he had finished she said:

"Do you think the mysterious stranger was Jesse James?"

"I am quite sure of it."

"Then he has been false to his band."

"He has?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Because none of them know anything of the disappearance of the diamonds."

"Don't they?"

"No."

"Sure?"

"I am. There is Dick Little, Wood Hite, Bob Ford and several of the boys who keep no secrets from me. If they had got any of these diamonds I would now have been adorned with them."

"Would they divide with you?"

With a saucy laugh, Mrs. Hite turned up her pretty eyes and said:

"I would have had them all or I don't know myself."

"Then you really think Jesse has played the band false?"

"I know it. It's not the first time. He's a knave."

Then the train thundered on.

Both Carl Greene and Clara were silent.

The whistle sounded.

A brakeman came to the door and called out:

"Orangeburg!"

"What—forty miles yet? How slow we are!"

Carl Greene had his men distributed in two cars.

They sat two together, in order to be able to support each other when the final struggle came.

Carl turned to Clara Hite.

"Clara, have you any compunctions of conscience in this matter? That is, I mean is there any one among the outlaws whom you want spared?"

She quickly and firmly answered:

"Not one."

"That settles it."

"Not even if my old man is among them. Shoot him down as well as the others."

"We will."

Carl rose and walked down the car.

He knew his men.

Every one was awake, though some pretended to doze.

Carl Greene had twelve men with him.

Six were in the smoker, and six were in the car next to it, so that all would be near the express car when the attack should be made on it, for they felt assured that the assault would be made on the express car.

"A glorious little surprise awaits the Missouri bandits to-night," said Carl Greene to himself.

He also knew that a desperate battle was in store for them.

The detective sat down in a vacant seat near the door of the smoker, and leaning his head back, actually fell asleep.

But few men can sleep when they are expecting an attack every moment.

But Carl Greene was quite well used to danger and conflict.

He slept until suddenly there came on the air a loud whistle.

Carl started up.

"Suppose they should, after all, ditch the train?" he thought.

The detective glanced at his watch.

It was three minutes past midnight.

The hour had arrived and they were on the ground.

The engine whistled down brakes, and the train began to slow up.

"What's the matter?" cried a passenger.

Everybody was now wide awake.

The conductor who passed through the car was besieged by all:

"What is it?"

"What's happened?"

"Are we at a station?"

"Is this Rugby?"

"Are we off the track?"

"Are we about to go over the bridge?"

"Oh, what has happened?"

"I was asleep and didn't know anything about it."

"I guess it's all over with us."

"Hush, fools!" roared the conductor, quite angry. "I can't answer a hundred questions at once."

Meanwhile the train continued to slow up.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE HAYSTACK.

Bang!

Pop!

Pop!

Crack!

"Oh, murder!"

"Help!"

"What is it?"

"My wife's fainted."

"What has happened?"

"We'll all be killed."

The wildest confusion everywhere prevailed.

The roar of pistols, the horrible yells without, made it seem as if a thousand fiends were battling with them.

Carl Greene awoke to find the outlaws pouring in a fire into the roof of the cars. The lights were shot out and they were almost in total darkness.

"Down!" cried a voice.

A tall man leaped on the platform of the car.

Another struck him.

He fell off, but as he went he shot the man who struck him.

The bandits were now in the express car pounding at the safe.

Bandits were everywhere lurking on the cars.

"Down!"

"Down!"

"Down!" cried voices, right, left, and on every side.

Bang!

Bang!

Pistols flashed, and the deafening reports drove the timid almost frantic.

Jesse James and Cole Younger were engaged at the safe, while Frank and the others were attending to the cars.

Suddenly a piercing whistle sounded on the air.

In a moment Carl Greene and his band of detectives gathered themselves together for the fearful struggle.

Again that ear-splitting whistle sounded.

Twelve men drew twenty-four revolvers.

A fight began.

The rapid discharge of fire-arms, the shouts and yells and shrieks of affrighted passengers made a scene that was simply appalling.

Jesse James, who, with Cole Younger, was at work in the express car, trying to burst open the door of the safe, heard the rattling crash of fire-arms and wild shouts of the combatants.

It was the first sounds of conflict they had heard since the close of the war.

Jesse suddenly cried:

"Cole, that's a fight!"

"Yes."

"It sounds like roar of battle."

"It does."

"Let us get out of this and charge them."

Just as they leaped from the car they met one of the frightened recruits, who said:

"Capen, capen, they are fightin'! They've got an army in there!"

"Hush!" cried Jesse James.

He pushed the robber aside, and with a yell ran up the railroad where a small party of his band were trying to make a stand against a party of stout men who fought like demons.

There was no doubt but that it was an organized resistance.

The outlaws were being forced back.

The leader of the opposing force was a tall, powerful man with a broad-brimmed hat.

He had a pair of pistols which worked like engines.

Some of the recruits had already fallen; others ran away.

It was not long when Jesse joined them until the retreat was stayed.

It was a fearful onslaught, and the banditti had been driven from the train without getting over a dollar.

The detective chief, Carl Greene, was not content with merely beating off the outlaws. He resolved on capturing the entire gang if it was possible.

He sounded his shrill whistle three times, and the detectives, who had been gradually flanking the bandits, made a dash for the horses of the outlaws.

Jesse James, who realized their intentions at this moment, cried:

"Don't let them have the horses! Run—fly to the horses!"

They made a dash for the horses at the same time.

There was a race now for the horses, and friend and foe were mingled, fighting, shooting and striking at each other.

Jesse and Frank James gained their horses.

Jesse vaulted in the saddle, and Siroc, prancing and leaping gayly, tossed his head and snuffed the air.

The bandit king presented his revolver and emptied every cylinder.

"Huzzah, boys, drive 'em down the hill!"

Carl Greene and two or three of his men had gained horses.

They procured them by hard fighting, and more than one outlaw was knocked down.

"Scatter!" roared Jesse James. "To shelter! To shelter!"

Then, Siroc was wheeled aside, and like a rolling thunder storm sped down the lane.

Carl Greene was so close behind him that he could have thrown a stone and struck him.

Carl was mounted on a swift-footed, thoroughbred horse, and flew like the wind over the ground, but he could not overhaul the swift-footed Siroc.

Siroc's equal in speed had never been known.

"Stop, Jesse, halt! I have a revolver loaded still."

Jesse urged Siroc on.

"Surrender, or I will open fire!"

"Get up, Siroc, my noble fellow!" roared Jesse.

He threw himself along the neck of his horse so as to take up as little aim as possible.

"Surrender!"

"I won't!"

"Then I'll have to kill you."

Jesse had a pistol of his own, and pointing it back, he pulled the trigger.

Crack!

Crack!

Whiz! Whiz!

A bullet passed oneither side of the detective's head.

"It is time for me to take a hand in this fight," he declared.

He raised his revolver.

Bang!

A shot whizzed along Jesse's back, ripping up the seam of his coat, and glancing along his head just at the back of his ear.

"That was too high!" declared Carl Greene.

"I will try another lower this time."

Again he cocked his pistol and pulled the trigger.

Bang!

Whiz! went the bullet.

Carl was sure he had hit the outlaw chief.

As the smoke cleared away he expected to see him fall off the horse.

But he rode on.

What had the bullet struck?

Jesse James' saddle was one of those stout tree saddles called a Mexican tree.

The bullet had buried itself in the back of the saddle, which was made of stout wood, covered with the toughest rawhide.

A few moments had been lost in the firing of these shots, and Siroc was every second gaining on his pursuer.

Carl Greene saw with alarm that he would soon be out of sight.

Jesse wheeled in his saddle and fired.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang! went three shots, and the balls whistled uncomfortably near the detective.

Crack!

Carl Greene's last shot knocked the fugitive's hat off his head.

Away they sped.

Suddenly Jesse's flying horse darted around a bend in the road and was out of sight.

Bang!

That shot was lost, for it struck a tree at the roadside.

Carl Greene was in sight in a moment.

But he had lost so much ground in the last hour.

Again, just as he was about to fire, the horse darted around a bend in the road and disappeared.

Carl Greene pursued, although he knew full well that he was losing ground every moment.

Away over the plain as far and as fast as Siroc could fly they went.

That speed was like lightning. Jesse knew he was safe. Not a horse in America could overtake him now.

The horse flew on and on, and Carl Greene and his slower steed dropped out of sight.

But a stern chase is a long one, and no one knew this better than Jesse James.

Jesse James also knew the character and temper of Carl Greene.

"He will follow me up to the bitter end," he thought.

There was not a moment to be lost.

Jesse James knew he must find a hiding-place before daylight.

Carl Greene was persistent, and would pursue him, too, as long as there was any possible hope of capturing him.

Jesse was not long in making up his mind what he would do.

He galloped up to the house of Tom Dugger on the Little Blue.

It was still two hours until daylight, and he had not seen or heard of Carl Greene for fully an hour.

"He must be fully ten miles in my rear," Jesse thought.

He called:

"Hilloa!"

A dog barked.

Again he called:

"Hilloa!"

A door opened, and a man in his nightclothes put out his head.

"Who's you?" he asked.

"Dugger, Dugger—Tom Dugger, don't you know me?"

"No."

"Come out here."

"I won't."

"Tom, I am in trouble."

"I don't keer."

"Can't you come and help me?"

"I dun know yer."

"You do."

"I don't."

"Tom, it's Jess."

"Jess?"

"Yes."

"Jess who?"

"James."

"What, Jesse James! Great su's, wot's up that brings yer here at this time o' night?"

"I am in trouble."

"Come in."

"I can't, Tom. I want you to come out."

"Wait er minit."

Then Tom Dugger made haste to put on his clothes, and hastened out to where the bandit king sat on his horse.

"Jesse, wot on yarth air ther matter?"

"Tom, we have had a great defeat, and I am flying for my life."

"Oh, yer don't tell me so."

"Yes, I do."

"How did it happen?"

"We attacked a train."

"A train?"

"Yes; on the Q., M. & P. Railroad, and they had a decoy aboard."

"Er what?"

"Decoy."

"What's that?"

"Well, it was a score or more big, stout detectives, all well armed."

"They opened fire on us and—well, Tom, I know not how many of my brave boys are sleeping on the cold prairie along the side of the railroad."

"Did they lick ye?"

"I don't know of any save myself that escaped, Tom. I think Frank, Cole Younger and Jim Cummins got away. At least, they got to their horses, and I hope they escaped."

"I hope so."

"But, Tom, I want a place to hide."

"Alr they arter yer?"

"Yes, they are close on my heels—one is, at least, and that one is the chief of all, Carl Greene, the detective."

"By jingo, ye'd better git out o' his clutches or ye'll hev ther feller enter yer throat."

"I know it, and I want a place to hide. Can't you think of a place where Siroc and I can be hidden away from sight so we will not be found?"

"By jemany, I've got ther very thing fur yer!"

"Where?"

"In my haystack."

"Haystack?"

"Yes. Made et jist yisterday, an' yer kin hide in thar er month."

Jesse James was naturally very curious to know what he meant.

Tom explained that he had made a frame egg shaped, about thirty feet in circumference, and built a haystack all outside of it.

"Outside et air a haystack," said the farmer.

"Inside et air tent or house."

"That is the very place," said Jesse James.

"I will take yer thar."

"Come on. I will keep ye thar er month."

They went to the meadow where the haystacks were.

Here they found the hollow haystack.

It was certainly a very cunningly conceived hiding-place.

Tom Dugger tore off some hay which covered the door.

He opened the door and Jesse and his horse entered.

The farmer lighted a lantern, which he hung upon a hook in the wall of the dome-like hiding-place.

"Now, Jess, yer kin lie here jest ez snug ez a bug in a rug, can't yer?"

"Yes."

"No 'n 'll ever look fur yer."

"No."

"Now on that side's er trough ter feed yer hoss."

"Thar's a barrel o' water, an' we are ther boys'll keep it full."

"And feed?"

"Wall, I'll bring yer a plenty right away."

"But," said Jesse, "don't let any one come near these stacks for forty-eight hours at least."

"Not arter I bring ye and yer hoss some grub."

"Well, hurry up with the grub."

"I will."

The farmer went away and Jesse James threw himself down on a pile of straw to rest.

His long ride and his hard experience at the train had been too much for even Jesse James' iron frame.

His noble horse stood at the other side of the inclosure with flashing eye and proud, disdainful step.

His long race had not cooled the fire in the noble beast.

As Jesse lay waiting the return of the farmer he began to think:

"I wonder what has become of my poor band. My boys scattered and cut to pieces as they are—perhaps all slain by this time. I may be alone in the world, and the world will then prove a howling wilderness to me."

"Where are the brave boys whom I led to the charge—who dared rob the banks and trains?"

"For aught I know gone, gone—all gone."

At this point in his meditations there came a slight noise at the entrance.

Jesse started up, cocking his revolvers.

"Et air only me bringin' yer some grub an' euthin' fur ther hoss," said the farmer, as he entered with a basket and bag of corn and oats.

He dragged in an armful of hay and said:

"Now yer kin feed."

CHAPTER IX.

THE HARVESTERS.

JESSE JAMES was not hungry, but as he was to be alone for forty-eight hours he knew that he might be hungry.

"Tom!"

"Well?"

"Has he come yet?"

"I've seen no one since you come hyar."

"He'll be here soon."

"Let 'im come; he can't find yer."

"Tom, what are you going to tell him?"

"Ther detective?"

"Tell 'im ter go ter thunder an' not come er-botherin' around me at all."

"Well, you must be sharp."

"I will."

"If you leave the least suspicion in his mind, he will hang about the place until he has found me."

"Wall, now, ef he comes er-foolin' erround me too much, I just want ter tell yer he'll git er dose o' buckshot."

"Go, now, an' keep a sharp lookout. I don't want you to let him get the upper hand of you."

"I won't."

He went and left Jesse James alone with his thoughts.

They were by no means pleasant thoughts.

The bandit king had much to annoy him.

The unknown and doubtful fate of his companions was enough to fill his soul with dread.

Mr. Tom Dugger went to his house and had retired to bed.

He had scarce done so, when the dogs began to bark furiously.

"Hello!" cried a voice.

The dogs roared.

"Hello!"

The old man slowly rose from his bed, and putting out his night-capped head from the window, said:

"Wot's ther matter?"

"I want to stay all night," said a man on a jaded horse.

"All night! Why, great golly, it's daylight now!"

"Now, I'm pegged out."

"Who are ye?"

"I'm Jimmy Slocum."

"Whar yer been?"

"I've been ter a dance across the river."

"Why don't ye go home?"

"Got lost."

Mr. Dugger declared there were too many bad characters out on the road for him to take in everybody that came.

"Won't yer lemme stay?"

"No."

"Wall, answer some questions."

"Don't yer see it's gettin' daylight?"

"Yes, but I'll want some breakfast arter erwhile."

"Come back in two hours."

"Whar'll I stay meanwhile?"

"Sleep on ther ground with yer hoss."

Carl Greene, for it was he, had his suspicions aroused by the careful manner of the man.

He went under the hill behind the barn, in full view of the haystacks, and hid his horse.

The reader of course understands that the horse which Carl Greene rode was one of the outlaw's horses.

The animal whinnied at sight of the haystacks.

"So you are hungry, poor fellow? Well, I have ridden you hard, and now you shall have hay at least," said Carl Greene.

He sprang over the fence, hurried across the meadow to the freshly built haystacks and gathered an armful of hay for his horse.

Carl Greene took hay from the very stack in which Jesse James lay concealed.

But the bandit king was not discovered.

Then he went back to the horse, placed the hay before him, reserving enough to make himself a bed, and laid down to think and doze.

Carl Greene was naturally very anxious about his men.

How had the fight terminated?

As the reader knows, Jesse James and Carl Greene had fled away from the scene before the conflict was decided.

"Some of my boys fell. I know it," he said.

But at last his weary eyes closed just as the shrill notes of the distant chancicleer began to announce the dawn.

He slept until the sun was shining in his face, and then he awoke.

Carl rose, and leading his horse up to the house not an eighth of a mile distant, called for the owner.

"I am here!" answered the gruff old Tom Dugger, who was in the yard sharpening a scythe.

"Can I get breakfast?"

"Say, ain't yer the son o' a sea cook wot was here last night?"

"Yes."

"Wot's ther matter with ye, anyway? Been drunk?"

"Yes."

"Thort so."

"Well, I ain't the only one that gets drunk. Hahn't ye had some o' the rest here?"

"Yes."

"Last night?"

"Yes."

"One?"

"No - no one."

"But ye said yes."

"I didn't mean it."

"Now, say, didn't a feller come here afore I did?"

The old man put down his scythe and gave the detective a keen glance.

The boy who was turning the grindstone stopped and fixed his pale blue eyes on Carl Greene.

Carl Greene had thrown out the question as a feeler.

He had expected to receive a negative and he did, but he read more in the face of the farmer than his answer told.

"No."

Dugger at last answered sharply:

"Thort I saw some one comin' this way."

"Guess ye didn't."

"Guess I did."

"Mean to say I am a-lyin'?" Dugger asked.

"No."

"Yer don't?"

"No."

"Wall, yer come mighty nigh it."

"I did not."

"Yer did. Now look you here, mister, yer jist a plagney sight too sharp, yer air."

"No, I ain't."

"Well, yer think yer air."

"I don't."

"When it comes to ridin' up to people's houses and hallooin' 'em out long afore day et's bad ernuff, but yer must come an' go ter callin' me er har besides."

"Maybe the feller I am talkin' erbout passed while yer was asleep."

"No, he didn't."

"He must a done it."

"But I say he didn't—didn't I—"

* Dugger was almost on the point of telling Carl Greene that he was awakened and had a talk with the man, when he remembered that he was about to betray Jesse James' secret.

"I am er blasted fool!" he declared.

"Wall, I won't dispute yer word."

"Call me a fool?"

"No," said Carl Greene.

"Yer do!"

"No."

"Wot is it then?"

"Ef I dispute yer word yer accuse me o' lyin', an' I won't say anything."

"Say, mister, yer not sich a fool as yer look."

"Now, I want ter tell yer sathin'," said the cunning detective.

"Wot is it?"

"As I war comin' here last night, I heerd a awful clatterin' o' hosses' feet."

"Where?"

"On the road."

"Comin' this way?"

"Yes."

"Who was it?"

"Er feller ridin' like Jehu on a big black hoss an' another arter him."

The farmer began to open his eyes.

He thought:

"Maybe arter all this 'ere feller who I thort was the detective ain't a detective arter all. Why, he don't look one bit smart."

Jesse James had cautioned him against Carl Greene, telling him he was a shrewd fellow and would deceive anybody.

But he was not prepared for the cunning with which he was to combat.

"War they comin' this way?"

"War."

"How clus war the man behind?"

"Wall, I'd say two miles, an' he war a-losin' ground all ther time."

"War he?"

"Yer bet. That man on ther black hoss war jist er climbin'."

"Was he?"

"Yes."

"Wall, I reckon thar ain't a hoss on earth as could outrun Siroc."

"Who is Siroc?" asked Carl.

"Did I say Siroc?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I'm a blarsted fool, I am."

"Are yer?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Fur talkin' so much."

"Why, yer ain't talked any."

"I hev."

"I'd like ter know who Siroc is."

"Did yer never heer o' him?"

"No."

"Wall, I'll tell yer he's a big black hoss."

"Racer?"

"D'yer live in Missouri?"

"No."

"Whar air yer from?"

"Eeelynoy."

"Then yer never heerd on him."

"Siroc?"

"Yes."

"No."

"Wall, he air a hoss."

"So ye said."

Then all was silent.

"Was it him last night?"

"Who?"

"Siroc, as called ye up."

"I never said no one called me up."

"Didn't ye?"

"No."

"Who waked ye?"

"You did."

Carl Greene had probed the old scoundrel deep enough to know that he was trying hard to deceive him.

He was not long in laying his plan as to what he would do.

Carl Greene was shrewd at planning and quick to plan, too.

"Now, old gent, you an' I hev quarreled about ernuff; gimme my breakfast an' I'll be goin' erway."

"Will you?"

"Yes."

"Wall, by jemanany, yer kin hev et an' welcome, because I want ter git rid o' yer."

"Do yer?"

"Yes. Come on."

The farmer led the way to the house, and called to his wife:

"Hyar, Sukey!"

"Wall?"

"Gin this feller his breakfast, an' be purty dinged quick erbout it."

Carl Greene soon found himself sitting at the table eating.

It was a sumptuous repast for a hungry man.

While eating his breakfast he heard the farmer say:

"Dog gone et, I do wish I could git some harvest hands!"

"Hyar's harvest on us, an' we an' everybody as ever promised ter help me hez jist played out completely. Et air too bad."

The confession made a deep impression on Carl Greene.

It put a new thought in his mind.

"Jesse James is at this house or near here, and I will come back, and in the disguise of a farm hand I will engage work."

Then the detective rose and went to his horse. Mounting, he rode away.

Carl went to the nearest town, disposed of his horse, and went to the tavern, where he engaged board for a week.

That night the stranger at Smiley's tavern disappeared, and next day a middle-aged laboring man, with a bundle on his back and an old coat slung over his shoulders, appeared at the farmhouse of Tom Dugger and asked for employment.

"Do yer want to work?" asked the farmer.

"Course; that air wot brung me here."

"Wall, I kinder reckon ez how ye've struck the right place. How much d'yer want er day?"

"All I kin git."

"Wall, I don't only give er dollar an' two bits."

"Two bits!"

"Yes, er dollar an' two bits."

"Why, great snakes, I allers git er dollar an' four bits!"

"Can't give yer four bits."

"I never worked for two bits."

It seemed for awhile as if the new-comer would go further to seek employment.

"I guess I kin find work some'ars else."

"Can you?"

"I kin try."

"Why, great snakes, jest try. Old man Orr only gives er dollar an' er quarter. Mike Clem don't give no more'n that, nor does Godlep Eitle, nor George Bragg only gives er dollar. Old Tom Flynn he gives one dollar an' a quarter, same ez I do, but yer work from daylight ter dark an' git but dinged little ter eat."

The wayfarer for awhile reflected on the matter, and then decided that the best thing he could do was to accept the former offer.

The night before the appearance of the stranger, who gave his name as Dick Blister, Tom Dugger went to the haystack and had a long talk with Jesse.

"Tom, have you learned anything about the fight?" Jesse asked.

"Heered on it! Why, I hain't heern o' anything else."

"How many of my boys were killed?"

"Three."

"Three! Was that all?"

"Every one that was killed are found."

"How many were captured?"

"One."

"Only one?"

"That's all."

"His name?"

"Barney Mare."

"Oh, one of the recruits?"

"Yes."

"What was done with him?"

"He is in jail."

"I wonder what will be his fate?"

"He'll get twenty years."

"Perhaps they'll hang him?"

"Perhaps."

"Who does the papers say attacked us?"

CHAPTER X.

A FIGHT IN THE ORCHARD.

"Carl Greene and some o' Pinkerton's men."
 "Were any of them killed?"
 "No."
 "All escaped?"
 "No, three were wounded. Two passengers were killed and five wounded."
 "Then they'll hang Barney?"
 "I don't know."
 "Well, Tom, I am tired of staying here."
 "I wish ye'd come and help me harvest my wheat."

Though this was said in a joke, Jesse meant it in earnest.

"That's the thing," said Jesse James.

"What?"

"I'll do it."

"Harvest?"

"Yes."

"Air yer mad?"

"No."

"Why, don't ye know some un'd see you an' report on yer?"

"No. I will pass myself as a farmer. I will disguise as a farm hand and come up to your house to-morrow at noon, and do you employ me."

"I will."

Carl Greene, as Dick Blister, engaged work, and all day long he followed the reaper, binding the wheat as it fell from the machine.

At night he came to the house and saw another laboring man.

"Who is he?" Dick Blister asked.

"Jack Stone."

"Does he work?"

"He's goin' in the field to-morrow."

Then Dick Blister sought the new hand and asked:

"D'ye intend ter work hyar ter-morrow?"

"Yes."

"Whar'd yer come from?"

"From Dover."

"Missouri?"

"Yes."

"Ever been here afore?"

"No. How long hev you worked for Mr. Dugger?"

"Just commenced ter-day. I tell yer et air purty tough."

"Works yer hard?"

"Awful."

"Maybe I kin stand it," Jack Stone said.

"You ain't been workin' much in the harvest?"

"No. I've been in a store erwhile, but I wor at last fired out o' it, yer understand."

"Why?"

"Well, gittin' too much drunk, yer see. I oughtn' er done it, I know, but it ain't no use ter cry over spilt milk."

"No."

"Wall, I want ter tell yer this'll be my fust work in ther harvest field fer ur good long while, but I am goin' ter keep up my row or burst. I don't keer wot may happen."

Carl Greene lay awake a long while that night. "I don't understand this fellow, Jack Stone," he said.

"Who can he be?"

At last he fell asleep.

Next morning, at dawn of day, the horn blew for breakfast, and Carl Greene rose.

Being unaccustomed to hard labor in the corn-field, he was naturally very stiff and sore.

Jesse James, as Jack Stone, was just about to begin a day's work.

They then sat down to breakfast, side by side.

Now the reader is no doubt asking himself, if they positively knew each other, why did they sit down to the table together?

Well, they did not know each other.

Carl Greene had strange impressions that the man who had just been employed by the farmer to aid him in the harvest field was not a farm hand. He might be Jesse James, and he might not.

Carl's suspicions were not enough for him to act.

"I will wait and see," he said.

He found himself sometimes almost convinced—then doubting.

Jesse James, on the other hand, felt a little uneasy under the piercing eagle eyes of the man Dick Blister.

Breakfast over, the farmer said:

"Now, all ter work. We've got ter make hay while the sun shines."

"I tell ye, boys, we don't lose any time here. We are all workers, we air."

"I am ready."

"Good for you, Dick Blister!"

"Me, too."

"All right, Jack Stone. I knew ye war made out o' ther right stuff. Come on."

"YER Dick Blister?"
 "Yer Jack Stone?"
 "Yes."
 "Oh, yes."
 "Wull, I thort maybe ye might want ter take ther lead."

"No."

"I don't."

"Why?"

"Wall, I won't."

The reaper, with its loud clattering wheels, at this moment rolled by.

It was drawn by two fast working horses, and the rake swinging round swept off the grain in great bunches.

"Light in, Dick."

"Light in, Jack."

"No."

"Well, I won't."

"Say, let's toss up, Jack."

"What for?"

"Ter see who takes ther lead."

In order to understand the meaning of this quibble about taking the lead, the reader must understand two things.

What taking the lead meant, and the character of the James Boys.

In those days before the time of self-binders, they had self-rakers which raked the wheat off into little heaps and men went about, gathered it up and bound it into sheaves.

One who started first took the lead and was before.

The James Boys never permitted any one to get behind them, and if Jesse James consented for the man called Dick Blister to go second he would be behind him, and might shoot him without Jesse James knowing anything of his intention.

Therefore, the pretended Jack Stone (Jesse James) seriously objected to having Blister behind him.

They finally agreed to toss up a piece of money.

Jack had a copper, and they tossed up to see who should go first.

It fell to Jack's lot.

He went.

But he was nervous, and besides, he was an awkward workman at first.

He made such poor bundles that Mr. Dugger finally set him to driving the machine, and made his son, the former driver, take his place at binding.

Jack soon proved to be a good driver.

"Well, there is a little partiality shown here," thought Carl Greene. "I don't see why I was not permitted to take my place on the reaper. Very well, I think I see through it all."

Carl Greene found the farm work very laborious, and heartily wished this was over with.

"I am going to make some discoveries soon that will put an end to this," he said.

"Whar yer gwine?" asked the farmer that evening of Dick Blister.

"To the haystacks."

"What for?"

"Some hay."

"Wot yer want of hay?"

"For the horses."

"Don't go thar."

"Why?"

"Git hay from the barn."

The farmer was in a terrible rage.

"Now lemme tell you suthin'."

"What is it?"

"Ez long ez ye live hyar don't yer go over to them haystacks."

"I won't."

"Now I mean it."

"I suppose so."

"Well, see yer don't."

"I won't."

But under his breath he said:

"I will."

Then Carl Greene went to bed after supper thinking:

"There is some mystery—some strange, wonderful mystery about those haystacks."

"I am going to find out what it is."

He waited until midnight.

When all the house was wrapped in profound slumber he rose.

Carl was very careful not to be seen.

He crept from the bed.

In an adjoining room slept a man whom he had all along suspected of being Jesse James.

Carl raised the window and quickly descended to the ground.

Having reached the ground, he waited a moment to ascertain if he were discovered.

The old house was very still.

There was not a man or woman awake.

Even the old watch dog had gone to sleep in his box.

Carl Greene started out on his exploration of the stacks.

Carl wore a loose linen coat, which concealed his belt and revolvers.

So did Jack Stone.

As it was not far to the haystacks he soon reached them.

Then he paused and looked up at the small mountains of hay, and said:

"I don't see anything particularly strange about them?"

The moon had not yet risen, but the stars shone quite brightly, and by aid of their light Carl Greene saw a path leading up to one of the stacks.

Now, why should a path go up to the stack and stop.

On one side, it was the west side of the haystack, he found the hay considerably looser than on the other.

"Well, there may be something in this," he thought.

Some one had probably been palling hay out of the haystack.

He took hold of the hay and began pulling it out.

It was loose.

Carl Greene could not have told what prompted him to act, but he continued to drag out hay.

At last his knuckles struck some hard substance.

The detective was amazed.

What could it be?

More determined than ever, he continued to pull away the hay until he had exposed a door.

It was a wooden door, made of some boards nailed together, and he opened it and saw a great dark cavity within.

From that great dark cavity there came a wild, loud snort of a horse.

The adventure was growing dangerous.

Carl Greene had a small, dark lantern with him, for he had brought it in his bundle, and in a moment he turned on the light and flashed its rays inside.

He was amazed and lost in admiration.

The genius and skill of the farmer in constructing this hiding-place was wonderful.

The large black horse on the farther side snorted and neighed in affright.

As soon as Carl Greene had convinced himself that there was no person in the haystack, he walked boldly into the dome-like apartment and closed the door.

"It is Jesse James' horse," the detective laughingly said. "I would know Siroc among a thousand."

It was Siroc beyond a question.

There was Jesse's saddle and bridle lying in the strange apartment.

Jesse was gone.

Where was he?

At the house of course.

There was not a doubt in the mind of Carl Greene now but that Jack Stone was Jesse James.

"A pretty game he has been playing," said Carl Greene. "A pretty game we have all been playing."

At this moment Siroc gave vent to a neigh of recognition.

Carl Greene wheeled and cast a glance toward the door.

A loud laugh rang on the air.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha! Mr. Carl Greene, you have played it fine, haven't you?"

And there stood Jesse James in the open doorway with a cocked revolver leveled at Carl Greene.

He had crept up to the haystack, following close after the detective, for he had from the very first suspected his design.

But Jesse James was like Carl Greene, not fully convinced until he found him in the haystack.

"Do you imagine you are particularly shrewd?" asked Jesse.

"No."

Carl Greene was quick to think and act. He sprang between Jesse and Siroc.

"Carl Greene. Don't you know I would have to kill you?"

"Yes."

"You are right."

"I seldom make an erroneous guess."

"No, I know you don't."

"But, Jesse James, you love your horse."

"I do."

"You would almost as soon die as to have Siroc harmed?"

"Well, you are right."

"Now that is a rather large revolver."

"A forty-five."

"I supposed so."

"A ball from it would go through you."

"And kill Siroc. You could not give me a mortal wound, Jesse James, without killing or seriously wounding Siroc."

Jesse James had to admit the truth of what Carl Greene said.

"I will be sure to kill Siroc," Jesse thought.

"The scoundrel is now playing his shrewdest game."

Jesse was nonplused.

"Carl Greene, I've got you, at any rate."

"Have you?"

"Yes—don't move or attempt to move, or I will kill you."

"I have no doubt but that you could, Jesse James, but you won't."

"Why?"

"For the very reason I have given you before. You don't want to kill or mangle Siroc."

"No."

After a moment he added:

"But you can't move."

"No."

"Well, what are we going to do?"

"I can't say, Jesse."

"I believe that we had better offer an armistice. Let us make a treaty."

"Make a treaty?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Tell me who sent you to Missouri, surrender up your arms, promise me to leave the State in three days and I will let you off alive."

"Is that all?"

"Yes; isn't it enough?"

"Oh, it's too much."

"Too much! What do you mean?"

"You ask more than I do."

"What do you ask?"

"All I ask is for you to surrender."

Jesse laughed.

"Not when I hold the joker, right and left bower, and every card a trump."

"Oh, Jesse, don't be hilarious."

"I am not."

"Now, one thing more, Jesse."

"What?"

"Where are those diamonds?"

"What?" screamed Jesse James.

"Where are the old Zig Johnson diamonds?"

Jesse James was silent for a moment.

At last he said:

"Well, it's as I supposed. It is that that brings you here."

"Jesse James, you are false to the band."

"No, I am not."

"You are. You never told them of the diamonds. You are a traitor in that you failed and refused to tell them anything of the diamonds."

"How did you learn so much?"

"I know."

"How did you learn this?"

"I absolutely refuse to tell my author."

"Carl Greene, you are a bad, naughty man to come prowling about inquiring into my private matters."

"You are such a public character that one may inquire into your private affairs," said Carl Greene.

Carl Greene was all the while thinking how he could get the eye of the bandit off of him for a single moment.

If he could only get behind Siroc if but for a single moment he would be safe.

Carl Greene had in his belt a strong-bladed, sharp bowie knife.

Half a dozen strokes of it would cut a hole through the hay large enough for him to make his exit.

Carl Greene had been standing with his arms folded across his breast.

He was cool, daring and careless.

That is, apparently careless, for all the while he was waiting for the supreme moment to come when he would have the opportunity he craved of dashing under Siroc's belly and escaping.

It came.

For a single second Jesse James unconsciously lowered his revolver.

Then came the opportunity, and Carl Greene acted on it.

He made a leap under the horse and uttered a yell.

Bang!

Jesse fired, but so careful was he not to hit Siroc, that he missed Carl Greene completely.

Carl Greene threw himself on the ground.

His right hand drew a revolver and his left a

knife, and while he fired at Jesse with one, he slashed an exit with the other.

In a few seconds he was through the hole and out on the meadow.

"Escaped!" roared Jesse James. "No, by all I hate and fear, he shall not escape!"

With a yell of rage, Jesse James leaped from the door.

He ran around the haystack.

Crack!

A blinding flash.

A sharp report.

A whistling bullet.

Jesse shook his head, and for a moment thought he was hit.

Carl Greene had leaped a fence and ran to the orchard.

Jesse James crossed the fence a little lower down.

They were both now some distance from each other. Jesse saw Carl Greene and fired at him.

The ball cut an apple into pieces so near to Carl Greene's head that the pieces struck him in the face.

Carl stepped behind the tree, his face smarting and almost blinded, for a bit of the apple had struck him in the face.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Carl fired two more shots, and Jesse one.

The bullets knocked the tender bark from the apple tree, clipped off the leaves, and cut down a few apples, but neither Jesse nor Carl were hit.

It was not so dark but that they could see the outlines of each other, and yet it was too dark to get a good aim through the sights of their pistols.

Old Tom Dugger heard the firing, and half suspecting what was the cause of it, he sprang out of bed and loaded his double-barreled shotgun with heavy goose shot.

"Ef Jess' air in trouble I am goin' ter help him out," he declared.

He went to the orchard fence, climbed over it and began creeping along the fence, lying close behind the tall weeds and using all the precautions he would in creeping upon a wild turkey.

At last he heard a shot ring out but a few feet away, and turning his attention toward a large apple tree he saw a man lying at the foot of it.

"Jess!" he called.

No answer.

"Jess, Jess!"

A little louder.

"Well?"

"Air et you?"

"Yes. What are you doing, Tom?"

Jesse spoke in an undertone.

"Wot's ther row, Jess?"

"That Blister."

"Air et Blister?"

"Yes."

"Wot you an' Blister fightin' fur?"

"He is not Blister."

"Who?"

"Carl Greene."

"Whar's Blister?"

"There is no Dick Blister. It was only Carl Greene in disguise."

At this the old man gave vent to a whistle and raised his head above the weeds.

Crack!

Sharp and keen rang out the report.

A ball came whistling down the orchard and knocked off his old straw hat.

"Oh, ow!"

"Lay low," said Jesse.

"He shot at me."

"Did he hit you?"

"No, but he came so plaguey nigh it."

"Tom."

"Wot?"

"Why did you come here?"

"I jist came ter help yer out, Jess, ef yer war in a scrape an' I brung my old double-barreled shotgun along ter kill him."

"Why don't you do it?"

The old fellow now had about got the range of Carl Greene, and leaping to his feet he fired both barrels at once.

Bang!

Bang!

The recoil of the double-barreled gun sent old Tom heels over head on the ground.

The tremendous charge of shot played havoc among the apples, which fell in showers all about the smiling detective.

He could hear the conversation of Jesse James and old Tom from where he lay.

As soon as the old man had picked himself up and began to look about himself, he said:

"Say, Jess, didn't I give him thunder?"

"I doubt if you harmed him."

"Why?"

"You shot at random."

"Wall, I shot right at the place he war."

"But random shots seldom kill. Your principal damage was to the apples. Now reload."

He did so.

When his gun was all ready he asked:

"Now, Jess, wot d'yer want me ter do?"

"Creep around on his flank and shoot him from behind the tree."

Carl Greene heard this command and resolved to retreat.

He had made a stout fight in the orchard, but the enemy had too great an advantage over him for him to remain longer.

Slowly and cautiously he crept backward for about twenty-five or thirty paces, and then began to move off to the left in the vain hope of getting a flank shot at Jesse.

The nature of the ground and darkness, however, made this impossible and he retreated.

CHAPTER XI.

HE KNOWS TOO MUCH.

"Tom!" said Jesse.

Old Tom Dugger came up wiping the dirt and perspiration from his face.

"Wall, Jess, he got away."

"He did, Tom."

"Ef war too bad. I never missed my mark afore, an' I don't see how I did this 'ere time."

"Well, Tom, I must go."

"Erway?"

"Yes—after his escape I dare not stay here any longer. He will have a dozen officers, or a hundred if necessary, down on us."

"Wot yer goin' ter do, Jess?"

"Mount Siroc and get away."

"Wot's er goin' ter become o' me?"

"I don't know."

"Wall, by Jinks, I don't!"

"I suspect you will not be harmed."

"Jesse James, ef they knew I harbored ye they'd hang me."

"Say you didn't know who I was."

"But that air plaguey holler haystack?"

"It will give you away."

"Yer bet!"

"Haddn't you better burn it?"

"My haystacks?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"To destroy the evidence."

The old man studied for a moment and said:

"Wait till I get some hay away afore I burn 'em."

"Do as you like about that," said Jesse.

He knew he had not a moment to lose.

Consequently, he went to Siroc, saddled and bridled the impatient steed, and galloped away.

"Farewell, Tom!" he cried, as he rode away.

"Jess, I think it's gawl dinged mean fer yer ter git a feller in sich a scrape ez yer hev me an' then ride off an' leave 'em in this fix."

Jesse laughed a cold, heartless laugh, showing how little he cared for his friends.

Jesse was in twenty minutes thundering down the broad highway toward the Rutledge bridge, hoping to be there in time to cut off the detective.

But in his calculation he failed.

Carl Greene had taken a shorter route and crossed over.

As Jesse came thundering down the road, Carl fired a shot at him from the hill.

The ball whistled down the road past Jesse's ear and struck the ground.

Jesse turned in his saddle and sent back a spiteful shot in return, while a terrible imprecation burst from his lips.

It was too far to make an effective shot.

Carl and Jesse had both missed.

Jesse galloped on.

The moon was now shining on the scene.

Five miles beyond Jesse saw a carriage coming along the road.

It was a rich private carriage, and he determined to replenish his pocket-book.

On he thunders to the carriage.

The driver is half asleep on his box, when suddenly the angry roar of hoofs fall on his ear.

"Stop!" cries a voice.

A clatter of hoofs and shower of sparks as his horses are almost drawn to their haunches.

"Stand—pull up or a bullet!"

"Oh, don't!"

"Say, Link, what's wrong out there?" howled a voice from within the carriage.

"Some feller hez stopped me."

"Who is it?"

"Blamed if I know."

"Knock him down."

"Oh, don't!"

Jesse had thrust the muzzle of his pistol into the driver's face.

"What are you doin', Link?" roared the angry voice of a man from within.

"Stand and deliver!" shouted Jesse. "Quick now, or I will be apt to grow impatient and send a bullet through your head."

"Who are you?" bawled the old man from the carriage.

"Robber, thief, highwayman!" cried the driver. "Road agents."

"Did you hear me, you gent in the carriage?" cried Jesse.

"What did you say?"

"I say I want your watches and jewels and such little treasures and trinkets as you may chance to have."

"I won't."

"Then you can die."

"Uncle," said the sweet voice of a young girl inside the coach, "don't do anything rash."

"Now, Annie Floyd, I want you to keep still—do you hear, keep still."

"Uncle."

"What?"

"He is a desperate man."

"I know, an' he'll come to a desperate end if I get hold of him. I tell you, Annie Floyd, I didn't grow up in the Rocky Mountains to be frightened at a Missouri jayhawker."

"Sit still, uncle."

"Annie, don't try to hold your uncle."

"You must not get out."

"Yes, let him get out!" yelled Jesse James.

"I want him out here."

"Do you? Well, I'll come."

He sprang out and struck at Jesse with his cane.

But the quick moving Siroc avoided his blow, and the cane fell on the ground.

Jesse next moment had him by the throat, and slipping from the saddle, hurled him on the ground.

"Oh, sir, please, sir, don't murder Uncle George Bragg!"

"Oh, I will not, Miss Annie. I am short of funds, however, and I must have some. Come, old man, let us have no delay."

Jesse quickly deprived the old fellow of his watch and money and said:

"I always try to do up these little matters without any violence if I can. I cannot always control matters, you know."

"Now ye've got my money, my watch, what else do you want?"

"Oh, that diamond pin in your shirt front."

"Take it."

Jesse did.

"Now, Miss Annie, have you any money?"

"Some."

"How much?"

"Fifty or sixty dollars," Annie answered.

"Please give it to me?"

She did.

"There, thank you."

When he had pocketed the little sum of money, he said:

"Miss Annie, have you any jewels?"

"Only a few."

"But she's heiress to a big lot," cried the old man, Uncle George Bragg. "She's goin' to get half of old Zig Johnson's diamonds."

"Then hand me the few diamonds you have about your person," said Jesse James.

She did so.

"Now, are you Annie Floyd?"

"Yes, sir."

"From California?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have a distant relative in Missouri?"

"Yes, sir."

"His name is John Smith Jones, is it not?"

"It is."

"And you two inherited the old Zig Johnson diamonds?"

"We did."

"I have bad news for you."

"What?" asked the girl.

"The diamonds are gone. George Brighton was killed by his own wife, his house was robbed and Sarah Brighton is in a madhouse."

With this stunning intelligence Jesse James left the couple, bearing away the most of their money and nearly all their jewels.

Since the repulse of the outlaws at the train robbery, Jesse James had not seen one of his men.

He had learned, however, that all save some of the new recruits had escaped.

Jesse was riding carefully along the road in the direction of the bandits' usual haunt, toward the home of old man Hite, when he suddenly heard the clatter of hoofs behind him.

"Who is that?" he cried, drawing a revolver.

"Halt!"

"Halt!"

To the right, to the left came the command.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Friends of the Scarlet Flag!" cried a voice.

Jesse, who had half drawn his revolver, put it back.

The old signal cry, "Friends of the Scarlet Flag," had been borne over from Quantrell's time.

It was the signal and secret pass-word by which guerrillas, and after them the outlaws, recognized each other by the mystic word.

"Who are those coming?" Jesse asked, pointing to the rear.

"Friends."

"Come forth."

Two men stepped out.

"Frank!"

"Yes, Jesse."

"And Jim Cummins?"

"Bet your life, Jess."

"I began to be afraid you had all fallen."

"We were uneasy about you, Jess."

"Frank, are you sure those are friends in our rear?"

"Know it."

"Did all the boys escape?"

"All save the recruits."

"I am glad."

At this moment the two horsemen in the rear came up.

"Who are you?"

"Cole Younger," said one.

"Wood Hite," said the other.

"Wall, boys, I am glad to be with you."

"Jess, did he get you?" asked Cole.

"No."

"It was a close chase."

"Yes."

"I saw him fire at you, and was quite sure you were killed."

"Well, it was a close shave. I have his bullet still in the back of my saddle."

"Where is he?"

"Don't know."

"Left the country?"

"By no means."

"I believe he is not far."

"I know it."

"When did you see him last?"

"About two hours ago."

"So late?"

"Yes."

"Then he is near."

"Of course."

Jesse James added:

"Boys, he knows all about our hiding place at Hite's."

"Yes."

"He was there—he knows too much."

"Of course he does."

Then, after a moment's silence, Jesse James said:

"How did he escape from Hite's?"

"No one knows."

After a moment longer Wood Hite ventured to say:

"Jesse, I believe I know."

"How?"

"He was set at liberty."

"Who did it?"

"You would laugh at me if I told you."

"Your opinion?"

"Yes."

"No, I wouldn't."

"I believe it was Clara."

"Mrs. Hite!"

"Yes."

"Your own step-mother?"

"I do."

"Wood, you don't like her?"

"No."

"And of course you are prejudiced against her?"

"But that is so."

"Bosh! Nonsense!"

"Well, what reason have you to think it was Clara Hite who liberated Carl Greene?"

"Who else did it?"

"He might have got away himself."

"By the way, has she come home?"

"Yes, several days ago."

"Where was she?"

"Went to St. Louis."

"Why?"

"To see some friends of hers who belong to a company that is playing there."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. She was an actress, you know, before father married her."

"So I have heard."

"And she still has a hunkering for the stage."

"Yes."

The banditti were riding down the road at a gallop all the time Jesse and Wood Hite were conversing.

Jesse said he intended to remain several days at Mr. Hite's, unless he should become convinced that there was danger in the neighborhood.

They gained the Hite homestead before daylight.

Siroc was concealed in the underground stables under the hill, and Jesse went to the house and slept until the middle of the day.

Then he rose.

He went down-stairs and met old man Hite at the foot of the landing.

"Mr. Hite, where is Clara?" he asked.

"At ther kitchen."

"Tell her I want to see her."

The old man never asked the bandit chief why he wished to see his wife.

He went at once and sent Clara to the bandit chief.

The pretty young wife soon entered the apartment and said:

"Good-morning, Jesse."

"Sit down, Clara."

She did.

"Clara, did you see the prisoner who was here?"

"Yes, I just got a glimpse of him," she answered.

"He disappeared very mysteriously."

"So I heard."

"Do you know how?"

Jesse watched her keenly.

But Clara had studied the art of acting too long to betray herself under even this trying ordeal.

"No, sir, I don't."

Jesse tried by every means in his power to entrap her into telling what she knew of his escape, but she was too shrewd.

She parried every question with wonderful skill, and Jesse James was forced to dismiss her without knowing any more than he had before.

That evening, as the James Boys sat in the front room playing cards and telling stories, Bob Ford, who was doing guard duty, came in and said:

"Some one's comin'."

"Who?"

"A stranger."

"Just one?"

"Yes."

"What is he like?"

"A young man."

Jesse then asked:

"From what direction does he come?"

"From over the hill."

Jesse rose, lighted a cigar, and sauntered to the gate.

"I wonder if it is Carl Greene coming in one of his infamous disguises?" he asked himself.

He saw a young man on horseback coming down the hill.

He rode a strawberry roan, and his face was partially concealed by his broad-brimmed hat.

As soon as he saw the house and a man standing at the gate he rode towards him.

"How do you do, sir?" he said. "I have lost my way."

"Where do you want to go?" Jesse James asked.

"To Freeport."

"Then you are certainly off the track."

"Where does this road go to?"

"Nowhere."

"And the road on the right?"

"Nowhere."

"I don't know what to do."

"Perhaps you had better dismount."

"Why?"

"Oh, it's growing late."

"Who lives here?"

"Mr. Joe Hite."

"Are you Mr. Hite?"

"Oh, no, I am Jeff Jackson."

"Do you live here?"

"I am working for Mr. Hite. There are several of us."

"What are you doing?"

"We are just a surveying party, that's all."

"Surveyin' another railroad?"

"Yes."

"Well, that beats all."

"Why?"

"The whole country is striped all over with railroads, and they are goin' to put in more."

He was an innocent-looking young man, whose Auburn hair clustered in little ringlets about his head and ears.

He dismounted, evidently never dreaming of danger, and said:

"I wonder if Mr. Hite would let me stay?"

"I don't know; go in and see."

As the young man went toward the house Jesse asked:

"What might your name be?"

"I am John Smith Jones, sir."

"Do you live in Missouri?"

"Yes, sir."

"Near Lexington?"

"Yes, sir. I was going to find a distant relative of mine, named Annie Floyd, who, on her way to Missouri, was robbed."

"Who dared do the dastardly act?"

"Jesse James."

"He is a bold one."

"Yes, sir, you are right, and I've got my suspicions, too, about him." With this the young man went into the house.

Frank James, who, sitting under a tree in the yard, had overheard all that was said, now came to his brother.

"Jesse, who is he?"

"Smith Jones."

"What, the same——"

"Yes."

"Does he suspect you?"

"No, but he knows it was Jesse James who robbed the house of George Brighton of all the jewels and diamonds."

"Does he?"

"Of course. He is the one who employed Carl Greene and set him on our track."

"Well, if he don't know us while here, he can't do us any harm."

"He can't do us any harm," smilingly returned Jesse, "but he knows enough to play the very mischief with us."

"How?"

"If he tells the boys that we have the diamonds of old Zig Johnson and refuse to divide with them, don't you see, it will break up the band."

"It certainly will."

"I wish we had met him before he came here."

"Why?"

"He knows too much."

"Then he shall never escape alive."

The James Boys really feared the youthful John Smith Jones more at this moment than Carl Greene.

He knew too much.

CHAPTER XII.

JESSE AND CARL FACE TO FACE.

WHEN Smith Jones entered the house he inquired for Mr. Hite.

Clara Hite, the young wife, met him at the door.

"Is Mr. Hite in?" he asked.

The young wife gave him a searching glance. No outlaw was more shrewd than was Clara Hite.

She was always on the lookout for detectives, and never, save in the case of Carl Greene, was she known to extend any mercy or sympathy toward them.

Carl Greene may well congratulate himself that he had this bold and unscrupulous woman as an ally.

He could not have found a better.

"Mr. Hite is in," she said. "Do you want to see him?"

"Yes."

"Who shall I tell him you are?"

"Smith Jones—John Smith Jones."

She smiled a sweet, dangerous smile, while her soft, brown eyes gleamed like the orbs of a serpent.

"Will you come in?"

She led him to the sitting-room and said:

"Sit down."

"All right."

Then she glided into another part of the house and from the window beckoned to Jesse.

He came toward her.

"What do you want?"

"John Smith Jones is in the house. Do you know him?"

"Yes, Clara."

"Is he a detective?"

"Well, I suspect him."

"Did you know he was here?"

"Of course."

"Then you will keep a watch over him. He wants to see old Uncle Hite, and I suppose I have to send the old fellow to him."

"Do you know what he wants?"

"I suppose to stay over night."

"Tell Hite to keep him."

"You want to pluck him?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I hope you will do a good job of it."

"We will."

"I must go now and send Hite to him before he suspects."

"Do so, and we will keep a sharp watch over him, so that he cannot possibly escape."

"Yes, sir."

Clara hastened away.

She found the old man sitting on the back porch, smoking his pipe.

It was a dismal life old man Hite led.

There was no harmony between him and his wife.

He sometimes thought the fair Clara utterly despised him.

"A man wants to see you," she said.

"Who?"

"John Smith Jones."

"Don't know him. What does he want?"

"To stay all night."

"What'll Jess say?"

"Says keep him."

Having received his instructions, from which there was no appeal, he went to where Smith Jones was in waiting.

"Well, sir, what do you want?"

"I beg pardon," said Jones, "but I am lost."

"Are you?"

"Yes, and it's late."

"D'ye want to stay here?"

"Yes."

"All right."

"Can you take care of my horse?"

"Yes."

"Well, I shall be very much pleased."

"We've got several people here," explained old man Hite. "They are all surveyors, building a new road."

"Yes, so I was told."

Jones innocently believed that the old man told the truth.

He sat in a chair to await the summons of the landlady to come to supper.

He did not suspect for a moment that these men were terrible outlaws, or that his life was in any danger.

While he was waiting in the front room for supper, Jesse James summoned all the band to a large shed or outhouse, where he said:

"Boys, we've got a spy here."

"Spy?" cried every one.

"Whist!"

He raised his hand to enjoin silence on all.

"Is he near?"

"In the house."

"Well, what'll we do with him?"

"Now, lads, this is a cunning fellow," began Jesse.

"Is it Carl Greene?"

"No, a partner and companion of his. One who is training under him, and will, I hope, this night hang as high as we will in the near future."

"That's right!"

"That's business!"

"That's my ticket!"

"I would give a dozen years of my life just to swing Carl Greene up into the air!" said Jim Cummings.

"Oh, Jim, you are too liberal with the years of your life!"

"Well, Wood Hite, you can be as sarcastic as you please, but I assure you it would do me a great deal of good to stretch his neck."

"The chances are, Jim, he will stretch yours unless we take some means to apprehend this fellow at once."

"Is he alone?"

"Yes."

"Let us go in and hang him at once."

"No; wait," said Jesse.

"Why?"

"Let him have his supper. I never like to hang a man on an empty stomach."

At this all laughed.

"We won't have long to wait," said Wood Hite. "Mag is cooking supper for him."

Mag was a deaf mute whom old man Hite kept in his employ.

She was a trusty servant, and could communicate nothing even if she had desired to do so.

Supper was prepared and Clara Hite went to the unsuspecting John Smith Jones and said:

"Supper is ready."

He rose and went to the dining-room.

He was alone with the deaf servant until Clara Hite came in and directed her how to wait on him.

The repast which, according to Jesse's plans, was to be his last, was an excellent one.

He ate heartily and pushed back his chair.

At this Clara struck a small call bell.

The doors, right, left and front opened, and Jesse James and Frank with a dozen strong men entered.

John Smith Jones was a little astonished at their appearance.

When he saw each at a signal from the chief draw a revolver his amazement became fear.

He cried:

"Don't—don't—don't harm me!"

Jones had a revolver in his hip pocket but he dared not use it.

He could not draw it and defend himself against that horde of outlaws.

They were all big, fierce men.

"Gentlemen, what does this mean?" he cried.

"Won't you explain it?"

"Seize him!"

At the command from the stern leader two of them seized the frightened Mr. Jones.

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Search him!"

In a moment each of the two men who had seized Jones were plunging their hands in his pockets. One of them was a brutal ruffian named Phil Smith.

Phil Smith was a new recruit who had not been long a member of the band. He was a boasting, cowardly thief, without the slightest sense of honor about him.

John Smith Jones was now more indignant at this attempted search than frightened or amazed. He knocked Philip down.

In a moment he was tied hand and foot.

"Did you find anything about him?" asked Jesse.

"Yes."

"What?"

"A pistol."

"What else?"

"Some money."

"Is that all?"

"No, not quite."

"Well, what else have you?"

"Some letters."

"Give them to me."

"Here."

"Is that all, Wood?"

"Yes."

"Don't keep back anything."

At this John Smith Jones, who was yet in doubt as to the nature of the men who had captured him, said:

"Gentlemen, I am no thief."

"No, but you are worse," growled Phil.

"What?"

"A spy!"

"I am not."

"Ye lie!"

"It is well for you that my hands are tied," cried the indignant Jones. "If I only had them loose I would chastise you for what you have done in a way you may regret."

"Wall, yer won't git a chance."

"Wait; you may see yet that I will."

"No, I intend ter hang yer with my own hands."

Jesse was meanwhile busily engaged reading the letters.

One was from Carl Greene.

He read it.

There was no date or location in the letter, but it was evidently written just before the abortive attempt to rob the train.

It was quite brief.

"I am on the ground. Have seen the J. B., and am now trying to locate the t——, but don't know where they have got it. I dare not arrest until the d——s are found. C. G."

Jesse James was shrewd enough to fill out the blanks.

His men could understand them he very well knew, and should they read the letter it might arouse suspicion.

There was another which had been mailed to California and returned to the writer.

It was the most mischievous of all, and had it fallen into the hands of any one save Jesse or Frank James would have caused no end of trouble among the James Boys' band.

It read as follows:

"DEAR ANNIE:

"It seems as if we are at last doomed to poverty. George Brighton, whom our relative, Zig Johnson, intrusted so implicitly turned out to be a scoundrel after all. He and another blacked themselves and tried to rob his own wife of the diamonds left in her charge.

"But she was a plucky woman, and by the aid of a stranger who had stopped to pass the night at the house they killed both of the supposed negroes.

"But it proved to be no benefit so far as saving our property was concerned. The stranger was none other than Jesse James, and he stole the diamonds, and has them in his possession. I have engaged Carl Greene to find them and he will succeed, I am quite sure.

"Jesse and Frank, I have learned through our

detective, are playing their own men falso. The band knows nothing of the chief and Frank James having in their possession over two millions in diamonds, and it is their intention to keep the whole amount themselves, unless we capture it, which we will do.

"Come home soon as you can.

"Yours lovingly,

"JOHN SMITH JONES."

These letters Jesse James slipped into his pocket to be destroyed at the first opportunity.

"Who is he, Jess?" asked Jim Cummins.

"A spy."

"Spy?"

"Yes, and a detective of the worst kind."

"It is not so."

"Oh, I have found enough against you to convict you."

"What'll we do with him, Jesse?"

"Hang him."

"Hang him?"

"Yes."

"Yes, hang him."

"Hurrah for a hangin' bee! I am in for it!" cried Phil Smith.

"So am I!" cried Wood Hite.

"Me too," put in Jim Cummins.

"Gentlemen, let me explain," began the doomed man.

"We want no explanation," cried Jesse, quickly. "I know who you are and what your motive is."

"Do you? But these men don't know it all."

"No, we know enough."

"Away with him!"

"I know who you are. You are Jesse James."

Jesse, fearful lest he should say something which would compromise himself and Frank, cried:

"Phil Smith, gag him."

"I will."

"Quick!"

"Let me ex—"

"Shut up his mouth, or shut off his wind!" cried Jesse, striking the prisoner across the mouth.

Before he had fully recovered from the stunning effect of that blow he had a handkerchief tied over his mouth.

"Take him out."

"Yes, away!"

"Come along!"

The prisoner made an effort to point at Jesse James, but Jesse cried:

"Seize him and tie his hands behind his back!"

This was done.

In a moment the man was completely helpless.

"Drag him up the road to the big white oak tree."

"Come on."

"Bring him on."

"Hurrah for fun!"

Never did a gang of school-boys enter upon a frolic with greater zest than these bandits.

They pulled their victim along.

He was even deprived the power of crying out in horror.

"Bring him right along. Hurry up!" cried Jesse.

Suddenly he heard the clatter of hoofs coming up the road.

"Halt!"

"Who is that?"

"Wait a moment, boys," said Jesse James.

All halted.

"It's only one of our own men."

"Bill Chadwell, what do you want?" asked Jesse.

"I want to see you a moment, Jesse," said Bill.

"About this affair."

"No."

"Go on and hang him," said Jesse to his men.

"Shall we wait for you?"

"No. All I want to know is an assurance that he is really dead."

"You'll have that."

"Yes, we'll have him swinging in twenty minutes."

"Bring him on."

"Hurry up, my honey. You shall soon be carrying on nothing"

"Hurry up!"

Then they hurried on with the unfortunate prisoner, while Jesse James halted behind to talk with Bill Chadwell.

"But, what?"

"Jesse, there's a spy near. I know it."

"So do I. We have just captured him," and

Jesse pointed to the party going over the hill with the prisoner.

"But another."

"Where?"

"In the woods."

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Not an hour ago."

Jesse James thought this matter serious enough for an investigation, and so he said:

"Bill, tell me all about it as we hurry over the hill after the boys who are going to hang the detective."

"Well, Jess, you know where the big swamp is?"

"Yes."

"It's not more than five or six miles away."

"I was out there this afternoon reconnoitering."

"Yes, I remember having sent you."

"I went straight to the swamp and was watching some cranes wading in the water, when I suddenly saw a man ride out of a clump of bushes."

"Was he alone?"

"Yes."

"Where did he go?"

"He came down to within two hundred paces of me—"

"Did he see you?"

"Not at first, but after a bit he raised his eyes to mine, and as I live it was Carl Greene."

"Carl Greene?"

"That's who it was."

Jesse James gnashed his teeth and said:

"Confound him, he is after us again! I will butcher him yet."

After a few moments he asked:

"Did he follow you?"

"Yes."

"How far?"

"I saw him not two miles from here."

"Did you?"

"Yes."

"Then we will have him before daylight."

"Of course."

At this moment they heard a shout and the sharp report of a pistol.

Whoops and yells went up from every side.

"Come, come, Bill, there is trouble ahead!" cried Jesse, bounding over the hill, followed by Bill Chadwell on horseback.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack! rang out pistols in the direction the party had gone to hang the captive.

Jesse whipped out his revolver and rushed toward the scene, crying:

"Bill, there is fighting over there!"

They ran as fast as Jesse's legs could carry him and came to the scene.

Here the bandit king met with a scene as terrible as it was disappointing.

Phil Smith lay dead on the ground, shot through the head.

Two more of his men had been knocked down, and were still confused and helpless.

The others had been scattered like chaff before the wind.

Jesse inquired the cause.

The cause was a sudden assault made by Carl Greene on horseback.

They had just got ready to swing the prisoner up into eternity when suddenly a horseman charged right into them, shooting and knocking them right and left until he was at the prisoner.

There he paused long enough to cut the ropes which bound the prisoner, and lifted him upon his horse, and away they flew like the wind.

Jesse James waited to hear no more.

With cocked revolver he ran into the bushes yelling:

"Hold—hold!"

Jesse tore through the woods and bushes like a madman.

"Carl Greene, coward, stop! Please stop and fight me!" he yelled.

"Oh, you miserable coward, you dare not stand and fight me like a man."

He tore through the bushes until he was at the bank of a creek.

There, on the other side of the creek, sitting on his horse, was Carl Greene with a revolver in his hand.

Jesse and the great detective had met face to face.

CHAPTER XIII.

OLD EVANS.

"Well, Jesse, as you want to see me, here I am," said Carl, coolly.

"Carl Greene, you are a murderer! You killed one of my men!"

"He was about to commit a murder."

"You are a wretch!"

"Jesse, don't be too hard on me. I do my duty."

Each of the men held a cocked revolver.

It needed only a motion for the deadly conflict.

"You are a coward!"

"Jesse, I have proven to you that I am not a coward. Now you will save trouble by surrendering."

"I won't."

"Then we must fight."

"Yes."

Bang!

Bang!

The two shots rang out so near together that they almost blended.

Carl Greene flung himself from the saddle as he fired, and Jesse fell to the ground.

These actions no doubt saved each other's lives.

Their bullets flew harmlessly through the air.

Jesse James scrambled to his feet and flew behind a tree.

Bang!

Bang!

The bullets flew through the air, and passed so near to the head of the bandit that he stumbled and fell against the tree.

He crawled behind the tree and cock his revolver.

There was not a moment to lose.

Though the bandit king was badly stunned, he was not disabled. He was able to turn on the detective.

But Carl Greene had disappeared.

He had been warned that the band of outlaws was coming, and wheeling his horse about, flew like the wind to the poor fellow whom he had rescued.

He seized him and drew him upon his horse and galloped away.

Jesse James was still a little bewildered when the remainder of his band came up.

"Jesse, Jesse, are you hurt?" asked Frank.

"No."

"Who did you fight with?"

"Carl Greene."

"Where is he?"

"Gone."

"Where?"

Jesse James pointed across the creek.

"Are you sure you are not badly wounded, Jesse?"

"I know it."

"Why don't you get up?"

He staggered to his feet.

He looked around.

"Boys, how many of us are here?"

"All that escaped."

"How many were killed?"

"Only one."

"Phil Smith?"

"Yes."

Jesse James said:

"Well, of all the entire band, I really think that we could best afford to lose Phil Smith."

"He was never any account," said Cole.

"Boys!"

"Well, Jesse?"

"We've got to make our longest flight now."

"Why?"

"Carl Greene is onto us."

"Yes."

"We can't stay here."

There was not a man in the band that did not agree with him.

Carl Greene was the great bugbear of the banditti, and his presence in the neighborhood was a signal for all to disperse.

The Hite house was no longer tenable for the outlaws.

As they were returning to the house Frank and Jesse, who were behind the others, fell into conversation over the recent stirring events.

"It will not do to make this house our home any more, Frank," said Jesse.

"No."

"Carl Greene knows this is our rendezvous, and he will have a score of men on our trail in no time."

"I know it, Jesse."

"We had better scatter until this thing blows over."

"Where will we go, Jesse?"

"Well, to mother's."

"You and I?"

"Yes; let us go together."

"I have thought that would be best."

"This is going to be a long and dangerous flight. For many it will be their last flight."

"I know it."

"Let us take care of ourselves."

"I am in favor of it."

Siroc and Jim Malone, the famous horses of the James Boys, were saddled, bridled and ready for the bandit princes.

The other members of the band, having buried Phil Smith near where he had fallen, were saddling their own horses.

"Jesse, are you going away?" asked Clara Hite.

"Yes."

"Didn't you hang him?"

"Who—the captive—the spy?"

"Yes."

"No."

"Why?"

"He was rescued."

"Who did it?"

"Carl Greene."

"Carl Greene!" and Clara Hite turned away.

Then Carl Greene, the only man whom she had ever attempted to save from the wrath of the James Boys, was really in the neighborhood.

There was a moment's silence, and Clara asked:

"Where are you goin', Jesse?"

"I don't know."

"Jesse, I want to talk with you a moment alone before you go."

Clara Hite had always wielded a strong influence over Jesse James.

He would refuse her nothing. So while Frank was looking to the horses, he and Mrs. Hite went to the apartment of the latter.

"Sit down, Jess."

"Hurry, Clara, for I have no time to spare."

"Well, to begin with, Jess, I suppose you will be amazed at what I am about to tell you."

"What is it?"

"I know all about the Zig Johnson diamonds."

"What!" cried Jesse James, bounding to his feet.

This was a secret which he had fancied to himself was known to no one.

He stood a moment glaring with starting eyeballs at the woman and cried:

"Who told you this?"

"Sit down."

"Who told you this?"

"Sit down and be calmer."

"I demand to know who told you!"

"Sit down and be calm and I will tell you all."

Jesse fancied himself to be calm and sat down.

After a few moments he said:

"Time presses, Clara. Now if you are going to make a revelation do so at once."

"Well, Jesse, you told me."

"I?"

"Yes; you yourself."

"When?"

"Several days ago."

"Woman, you are mad."

"No."

"Was I drunk or sober?"

"Neither; you were asleep."

He bowed his head.

Jesse knew he had a habit of talking in his sleep.

Often his brother had told him he would narrate in his sleep things that had happened during the day.

The cunning Clara knew of this habit and she took advantage of it to acquaint him of her knowledge of the diamonds.

"Now, Jesse, I will tell you all about it," she said.

Then she proceeded to narrate how she was going into his room one night shortly after his return from the expedition at Brighton's house.

She claimed that she heard him talking of diamonds and listened, and he narrated in his sleep the whole incident of the jewels.

Jesse knew that this might all be true.

He asked her if she had told any one.

"No, Jess; I thought it might be a secret which you and Frank wanted to keep."

"We do."

"I respected it."

"Thank you."

"Now, Jess!"

"Well, Clara?"

"You know I like diamonds?"

"Yes."

"I want some."

"Clara, you shall have them. But may not some of the boys have heard me?"

"No."

"Why do you say no?"

"Just because—if the boys had heard of it, they would certainly have told me so."

"Do you think they would?"

"Yes, I know it."

"Well, I am certain they would."

"Jesse, I feel that you have done me a wrong."

"Why, Clara?"

"By not sharing this secret with me."

"I—I really intended to give you some of the diamonds."

"But you seemed to have no confidence in me."

"Yes, I had."

"You never told me about it."

"I had no chance, Clara."

"Why didn't you bring the diamonds to me, Jesse?"

"Because they would have been seen. Some of the boys would have seen them, sure."

"Why do you think they would?"

"I was afraid of it."

"I could have hidden them, for you just as well as your mother."

"My mother?"

"Yes; didn't you put them in the keeping of Mrs. Samuels?"

"No."

"I thought you would."

"No—no, we buried the treasure where it will be safe."

"Jesse, that was wrong."

"Why?"

"Had you taken the diamonds to your mother, Mrs. Samuels, or brought them to me, I would have taken the very best of care of them; either of us would hide them where they could be found and where if you should both be killed would do some unfortunate survivor good."

"Well, I don't know, Clara, but that you are right."

"I know I am."

"Well, I will think it over."

"Do, Jesse. Put those jewels in your mother's possession. She is a shrewd old woman, and they will have a happy time getting the secret from her. I don't ask you to trust me unless you want to do so."

"Clara, I would just as soon trust you as any one I know!"

"But not as soon trust me as your own mother?"

"Yes."

"Oh, no, that is not natural."

"Well, I must go."

"Now, Jesse, take my advice about those jewels. Don't leave them buried in the ground where no one but yourself and Frank know where they are, but take them to your mother."

Jesse rose, and reflecting a moment, said:

"Well, I will either take them to my mother or bring them to you."

"Will you?"

"Do you think you will see me any more, Jess?"

"I hope so."

As he was going out, the artful woman laid her hand on his shoulder to detain him a moment, and said:

"Jesse."

"Well, Clara?"

"Oh, I know you will think me very foolish."

"What are you going to say?"

"It may seem very silly in me, but, Jesse, I would so like to see two millions of dollars' worth of diamonds."

Jesse James smiled as he answered:

"Clara, don't despair, and you shall."

"Shall I, Jesse?"

"Yes."

"You will let me look at them and hold them in my hands?"

"Yes, and chose the very best to adorn your person."

"Oh, Jess! You are too good."

"No, I am bad—bad as I can be," and laughing, Jesse left the room.

Clara smiled.

But hers was a different—yes, very different smile from Jesse's.

It was a half sneering, hateful smile.

"Yes—yes," she declared, "even Jesse James is a fool. Talk about your level-headed, steady bandit chief being so shrewd that no one can deceive him! Why, he is as wax in the hands of one who sees fit to manipulate him. I will get the secret, and Carl Greene shall have it. Oh, Jesse—Jesse! you are a fool—a detestable, miserable fool!"

Jesse James had, meanwhile, gone to his brother in the lane.

"Frank!"

"Well, Jesse?"

"Have you got the horses saddled?"

"Yes."

"Let us go."

As they were mounting the other boys came up.

It was quite evident that a general breaking up of the band was about to follow.

"Jesse," said Jim Cummins, "when shall we meet again?"

"I don't know."

"What, this is not the final separation, is it?"

"Yes, for all I know. If we live I will call the band together—"

While he was yet speaking a score of horsemen were seen coming over the hill.

At the sight of the James Boys they uttered a wild yell and charged down upon them.

"Timberlake—Timberlake!" cried Jesse James. "Now, every man for himself."

With hoots and yells the doughty sheriff and his posse came thundering down the hill.

"Fire!"

A rattling crash of fire-arms shook the air.

Bullets whistled like hail along the lane.

They splintered the fence and rattled against the sides of the house.

"Let us return the fire, Jesse!" cried one.

"Do so."

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

One of the advancing horses fell.

A saddle was emptied.

"Good for you, lads! Give it to them again!" shouted Jesse James.

Drawing his revolver, he wheeled Siroc about and dashed toward the sheriff's posse.

He drew his revolver and fired several shots at the enemy.

"Halt, you blood-thirsty cowards!"

Crack?

Crack!

Crack!

His companions now rallied around their chief. Once more the old guerrilla yell awoke the slumbering echoes of those old Missouri forests.

With tremendous shouts they bore down on the sheriff's posse.

Timberlake saw the storm coming, and strove in vain to avert the oncoming tide. But his men broke and fled.

Away they scattered like chaff.

The bandits, with reins in their teeth and a pistol in each hand, plunged right among them, and by their own impetuosity.

A sharp, shrill whistle of the outlaw chief brought them around, and again they charged right through and through them.

The posse were scattered now far and wide.

Jesse James called off the bandits from the fight.

Only two or three of the posse had fallen beneath their shots.

But the James Boys did not stop to ascertain if they were killed or wounded.

"Now away!" cried Jesse.

From that moment they began to scatter.

Frank and Jesse, riding together, galloped down the broad road and made their way in the direction of their mother's house.

"Jesse, I believe we are going to have a long flight," remarked Frank.

"Yes, if those had been detectives under the irrepressible Carl Greene we would have had a harder time than we did dispersing the posse of old Timberlake."

"Yes."

"Hello! Who is that?"

"Where?"

"Before us."

An old man could be seen coming down the road, driving a thin sorrel mare harnessed to an old buggy without a top.

He was a curious old chap.

On his head he wore a cap, the crown of which had been crushed down on one side until it toppled over.

He had a pair of rope lines in one hand and a whip in the other.

"Hello, old daddy!" called Jesse.

"Howdy do—howdy do?"

"Where are you goin'?"

"Ter ther dickens, fer all I know."

"What have you in your wagon?"

"Baker's pills, gypsy salve, an' medicine wot'll cure ager, chills an' lumbago, knocks fever straight—"

"It certainly must be remarkable."

"Wall, et is. Never seed sich good medicine in all my life."

He began opening a case, and went on:

"Now, let me tell yer, thar's a trial bottle o' my blood purifier wot yer kin hev for the small sum o' fifty cents."

"Why, you can outtalk a streak of lightning."

"Greased at that."

"Who are you?"

"Old Evans."

"Old Evans?"

"Yes; Old Evans, the patent medicine man; an' I tell yer jist wot et air, my friend; now, by jingo, I hev saved more people doctor bills than any anuther man wot travels in this 'ere country, lemme tell yer."

"Have you?"

"Yer bet. Won't yer take some?"

"Well, Old Evans, we are not sick."

"Yer might be."

"Then is time enough to take medicine."

"Take et first an' keep off yer sickness."

"No."

"Looker hyar."

He stooped and took up a roll of salve, which he held up before the James Boys.

"Now lemme tell yer."

"Well, go on."

"Ef yer git hurt, shot or cut, this 'ere is ther stuff as will cure yer in no time."

"I don't doubt your word, daddy."

"Won't yer take a roll?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Don't need it."

"But yer might."

"It's a rule, from which we never depart, that we never buy anything we don't want. So good-day, daddy."

The James Boys galloped away, leaving the old man quite disappointed, because he had not made a sale.

But no sooner were they out of sight than the expression on Old Evans' face changed. His eyes became keen and bright, and he gazed after the James Boys with a smile on his face.

"I knew it," he muttered. "I knew full well what would be the result of this, but nevertheless I will watch my birds. They are going to Dr. Samuels'."

"Ay, Jesse and Frank James, you are on your last flight!"

Old Evans drove on.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNDER THE WHEEL.

JESSE and Frank James continued on their course to their mother, Mrs. Samuels.

Dr. Samuels, the stepfather of the James Boys, was standing at the gate.

He did not recognize them until they were almost at the gate.

"Jesse!" he cried.

"Yes, doctor."

"And Frank too?"

"Frank is along also," Jesse said.

"Has there been recent trouble?"

"Yes."

"Well, what are we to do with you? What is the nature of the trouble?"

"It is Timberlake."

"Has he been after you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I thought you had no fears of him."

"Who else?"

"Carl Greene."

"The great Chicago detective?"

"Yes."

"Well, where is he now?"

"Somewhere around in the air, I'll warrant, doctor. We want to rest and hide here for a few days."

The doctor passed his fingers through his bushy beard, and said:

"Well, boys, you know you are always welcome."

"Yes."

"You have brought lots of trouble on us, but you are welcome for all that."

"Is the coast clear?"

"I think so."

"You have seen no suspicious persons around here, have you?"

"Not for three or four days."

"Well, I think we will be all right then."

"Yes, I think so."

"Where is John?"

"In the house."

"He might be sent to reconnoiter around."

"That's so."

Then Mr. Samuels called:

"John! John! John!"

John, who was a very studious boy, and was trying to decide how he would beat a flush with a straight, came to the door.

"Wot d'yer want, pop?" he asked.

"I want yer to take a boss and ride around the roads and look out for sheriffs, constables an' detectives."

John caught a glimpse of the two horsemen, and cried:

"Jesse and Frank!"

He leaped from the house.

He ran toward them.

Mrs. Samuels heard the joyous cry and came running herself to see if it was really Jesse and Frank James.

"Ah, Jesse!"

"Mother!"

"Frank!"

"Yes, mother."

"My boys."

She ran to greet them.

John Samuels meanwhile saddled the roan colt, and with a pair of Colt's navy revolvers, started out to reconnoiter.

"Where have ye been, Jess?" asked Mrs. Samuels.

"At Hite's."

"And ye been ran away?"

"Yes."

"By who?"

"Carl Greene."

"The detective?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I wish I could kill him!"

"So would I."

"I wish we had him in our power now. I tell ye we'd hang him higher'n Haman was hung."

Now the old woman had only a vague idea of Haman.

Her first husband, the Rev. James, father of Jesse and Frank, was a Baptist preacher, and she had heard him say something about a man named Haman being hung.

She believed her husband had read of his hanging, but whether he had gained his information from the Bible or the St. Louis Republic, she was not quite clear.

"Jesse!"

"Well, mother?"

"How long are ye goin' to stay?"

"I don't know, mother. Just as long as they will let us."

The old woman, waving her handless arm in the air, said:

"On, let them beware!"

"Come in," said the doctor.

"Let us put up the horses first."

"Trust me to do that."

"But we want to see where they are."

"Yes, come on."

Jesse and Frank followed their horses to the barn.

There they saw to the feeding and carefully rubbed down their reeking animals themselves.

"Come in the house," said the doctor.

They went in.

"Where is John?"

"Not come back yet."

"I hope he will not find any detective," said Jesse.

"Are ye tired, son?" asked Mrs. Samuels.

"Yes."

"Now, whar hev ye been?"

"All over the country."

"Fightin' and runnin'?"

"Yes, fighting and running."

"I am glad ye came out all right."

"Frank," said Jesse James, "what do you think about our box?"

"Of diamonds?"

"Yes."

"They are worth two or three millions."

"But are they safe?"

"At the old mill?"

"Yes."

"Why, I think so."

"Why not bring them here?"

"And give 'em to mother?"

"Yes."

"It would be a good idea."

"There are but two persons whom I would trust with them."

"Who?"

"Mother and Clara."

"Clara Hite?"

"Yes."

"Would you trust her?"

"Yes."

"I wouldn't."

"Oh, Frank, you are a crank about Clara."

"No, I am not."

"She is my best friend."

"You trust her too far."

"I don't."

"You do."

"I'd trust my life with her."

"Yes, and you would lose it."

Jesse laughed.

"Well, we will bring them here and leave them with mother."

"Well, you will do wisely. I'd defy any detective living or dead to get them from her."

"You are right, son."

"John has come," said Dr. Samuels.

"Where is he?"

"There at the gate."

Jesse rose.

"Oh, he is comin' in."

In a moment John Samuels was in the house.

"Well, John, what did you see?"

"I saw nothin'."

"Then you think we are safe?"

"Yes."

"I am glad."

"So am I," Frank put in.

"You poor boys are awful tired, I reckon?" put in the mother.

"Yes."

"Wall, ef the detectives come here, we will make it too hot for the detectives to live."

"We have made it warm for several of them."

"Right ye air, Jesse. Although yer little brother was killed, and I hed my hand tore off by a shell, it still does me good to think of the way we mowed 'em down."

"Yes, we did."

Supper was meanwhile prepared for the James Boys.

They went to the dining room and enjoyed a sumptuous repast.

When they had finished up their supper John Samuels came in and said:

"Some one is comin'."

"Who?"

"It air an old feller in a buggy."

At the mention of some one coming both Frank and Jesse James leaped to their feet and drew their pistols.

"John," said Jesse, "what is he like?"

"An old man with grizzly frouzled hair, and a cap that has tumbled over at the top, an' a nose all raveled out."

"Frank!" said Jesse.

"What?"

"I'll bet it's the old patent medicine man."

"I bet so, too."

"Who is he?" asked Mrs. Samuels.

"A detective?" queried Dr. Samuels.

"No."

"What?"

"Selling medicine."

"He's a bore!" declared Frank.

"May he not be more?"

"What more can he be?"

"A detective—Carl Greene in disguise."

Jesse and Frank James both laughed.

Then the former said:

"Do you suppose that we don't know what we are about? Do you think for a moment that we can't tell Carl Greene when we see him?"

"Not disguised."

Jesse smiled.

"Well," said the doctor, "what shall I do?"

"I've seen the old fellow, he is harmless, and I would not object to letting him stay all night if I were you."

"Then we will let him."

At this moment there came:

Tap!

Tap!

Tap!

The James Boys each grasped a pistol, more from habit than fear.

"Hoi!" cried a voice from without.

It was evidently a voice feeble with age.

"Hoi!"

Bang!

Bang!

Bang! came the rap of a boot toe on the door.

"Let me answer him," said Jesse James.

Jesse went to the door and asked:

"What do you want?"

"Danged ef my ole mare ain't erbout fagged out!"

"What do you want?"

"Want ter stay all night. My ole Betsy Ann air jist erbout fagged out."

"We don't keep a hotel."

"I know et, but, laws a mussy, yer not goin' ter make a feller sleep on ther ground jist on that account, be yer?"

"I don't know. What is your name?"

"Old Evans."

"What's your occupation?"

"I sell medicine."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you give your old mare some?"

"I ain't got boss medicine. I jest air got human goods," he answered, "an' ef yer want ter try some pills, tonics, cough syrups, and liniment, I handle Baker's lines of drugs complete an' kin sell ter yer cheaper'n dirt."

"We are not sick."

"By jingo, I'll be ef I hev ter sleep on ther ground."

"Then don't."

"How kin I help it?"

"Come right in."

With this Jesse James suddenly threw the door open and jerked the old hunchback into the room.

He looked about at the people with his weak, watery eyes in amazement.

At last he said with a most comical grin:

"How d'ye all do?"

"We are fairly well. How are you?"

"Oh, middlin' like."

"Sit down."

Mrs. Samuels pushed a chair over to him.

"Have you had supper?" the doctor asked.

"No."

"Do you want supper?"

"No."

"Don't you never eat?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"When I'm hungry."

"You do?"

"Yer bet. When I git empty I jest fill up," and the stranger stretched his long legs out toward the fire.

"You are Old Evans?"

Jesse James put the question, no doubt, to sound the old man.

He looked up at Jesse and said:

"By jingo, but ain't I lucky!"

"Why?"

"I've stumbled on old friends."

"Then you've seen me before?"

"Yes, an' now I'm a-goin' ter sell yer a roll o' my salve. It'll cure any cut or bruise."

"I don't want it."

"But you do."

"Do you think you know more about my own affairs than I do myself?"

"Yes."

"Do you go around telling people that you know what they want?"

"That's my business, pilgrim. Now, I don't keer how well yer air, a box o' Baker's little liver pills will make yer feel better."

He then started out on a long harangue on the virtue of his medicine, and never wound up until Jesse was thoroughly exhausted.

"Don't you think your sorrel mare is hungry?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Course I ain't."

"But you said she was fagged out?"

"Yes, she air."

"Well, what do you intend to do with her?"

"Let her rest."

"Won't you put her in the barn?"

The old man laughed and said:

"Why, Nance wouldn't know how ter act in a barn. She air er regular patent medicine hoss."

"What do you mean?"

"Why she air used ter roughin' it, an' I don't want her ter git used ter barns an' sich like."

"Do you leave her harnessed to your wagon all night?"

"Sometimes."

"You are certainly very cruel to the poor beast."

"Maybe I am, but Nance likes ter be used that way."

"Does she?"

"Yes."

"Well, I wish you would be more merciful to her while you are in a Christian house like this."

The old fellow evidently did not catch on to the meaning of Jesse James, for he went off into another long discourse on his valuable medicines.

Bedtime came and he was shown to his room, still sounding the praises of Baker's Pills and Fulkerson's Cough Balsam.

When all the house was buried in slumber, the patent medicine man, who was none other than Carl Greene in disguise, rose softly from his bed.

"At last," he said, in a low whisper to himself, "I am in the house of the James Boys, the stronghold of these imps of Satan."

Next thing he wanted most to know of himself was what he should do.

He crept softly to the door, which he pushed open.

With his dark lantern he flashed it over the hallway.

It was clear.

Next to his room was the sleeping apartment of Jesse James.

Jesse was sleeping in his apartment, and Carl Greene could hear him snoring. His sleep was profound.

The bandit king did not dream of danger.

Jesse James was in the home of his mother, John Samuels was down the lane on guard with the double-barreled shotgun, and he and Frank were sleeping soundly.

Carl Greene had with him his dark lantern,

which he took the precaution to light before he left his room.

Carefully turning on the light, he saw Jesse's great, brawny arm lying across his chest. Jesse was snoring.

Carl Greene took a vial from his pocket and a sponge.

Saturating the sponge, he held it to Jesse's nose.

In a few moments he was under the influence of chloroform, and helpless.

Carl Greene had carefully closed and bolted the door.

He tied Jesse's arms behind him, tied his feet and gagged him with a handkerchief so he could make no outcry should he recover.

Now for Frank.

Carl Greene crept away to where Frank lay.

He was almost at the door when he heard a noise inside.

There was a pile of household furniture near, and Carl Greene crept under this and squatted down, holding his dark lantern in one hand and his revolver in the other.

He had the pistol several times aimed at his heart, and was on the point of pulling the trigger and sending the villain to eternity with all his dark sins on his soul.

But Carl Greene never took life save when it was necessary.

Frank James was talking to himself.

"I can't sleep. Something is wrong. I am going down the lane where John is, and see if he is still at his post."

Going to the window, he gazed out.

"There's that old fool's horse yet."

The outlaw was still standing at the window, gazing on the scene and darkness below.

Now was Carl Greene's time.

He rose to a crouching position, and with his revolver in his hand crept up behind Frank.

Whack!

It was a very light tap, but it was given at the right spot, and the bandit went down.

Carl tied him and put a gag over his mouth.

Now came the hard trial of the detective.

How was he to get the prisoners out of the house unseen?

He finally found a rope, and from the gable window swung them down.

Then he crept down the rope, seized them and dragged and half carried them to the buggy.

Nancy, Carl Greene's famous sorrel mare, was quite well rested, and he put in the prisoners and leaped into the buggy.

"All safe now," he thought.

"Hello! Air yer goin' off?" cried John Samuels, who was coming up the lane with his shotgun.

"Get up!"

Nancy started.

"Stop!"

"Go on!"

"Halt!"

Bang!

The buckshot flew over Carl's head.

Jesse and Frank James had both regained their consciousness by this time, and began to kick and squirm about furiously.

Jesse James struggled over the side of the buggy and fell under the rattling wheels.

CHAPTER XV.

BIG DUKE.

THE wheel passed over Jesse James' body.

It cut and severed one of the bonds of his wrist and freed his right hand.

Though considerably bruised, Jesse James was not seriously hurt, and throwing up his right hand, he caught the side of the buggy.

He was dragged a short distance, when the revolving wheel caught his coat and whirled him up into the buggy.

"Here you are!" he shouted, seizing Carl Greene's throat.

Carl Greene's position was changed.

The report of John Samuels' gun had roused the entire household, and Dr. Samuels, seizing his gun, was running with John to capture or kill Carl Greene.

Old Mrs. Samuels, Jesse and Frank's mother, had snatched a single-barreled gun, and mounting a horse, man fashion, and without a saddle came flying down the road, her long hair streaming in the wind, her eyes blazing, while she gnashed her teeth in rage.

She had but one hand, the other having been torn off by a hand grenade in a fight with Pinkerton's detectives who had come out from Chicago to arrest the James Boys.

Carl Greene was in one of the closest places he was ever in during his life.

He heard the horse's thundering hoofs; he

heard the vixen's angry voice; he felt the baleful glare of her vicious eyes.

On she came.

Jesse clung to the detective.

Nancy flew over the ground at a tremendous rate of speed.

Carl Greene was forced to drop the lines over the dashboard and fight with Jesse James.

He hurled him off, but he fell to the ground.

At this moment the light vehicle struck a stump with a crash which made a wreck of it.

He was thrown from the buggy on the back of his horse.

"I'll git yer rags—I'll git yer rags!" shrieked the old woman, holding the shotgun aloft.

She was coming like the wind.

But Carl Greene was cool, and never for a moment lost his presence of mind.

Whipping out his knife he cut off the harness.

"Now, Nancy, fly for your life. I could kill you virago, but I would rather not; she is a woman, if she is the mother of two such demons as Frank and Jesse James.

Away sped Nancy like the wind.

She was a swift-footed animal and flew over the ground.

The thundering hoofs of Mrs. Samuels' horse soon died away in the distance.

Carl Greene escaped with his life, and it was a narrow escape at that, for the Samuels family, men and women, were all sure shots with the gun or revolver.

We must take leave of Carl Greene for the present and return to the James Boys.

Both of them were considerably stunned by the fall from the buggy, but Jesse was first to recover.

He bounded to his feet.

He saw Frank lying stunned and insensible near the wrecked buggy.

He ran to him.

"Frank—Frank, are you dead?"

Frank made no answer.

"I believe the scoundrel has killed him."

At this moment the old woman thundered up on her horse, and Dr. Samuels and John were coming.

"Is he killed?" asked Mrs. Samuels.

"I don't know."

"Cuss Carl Greene!"

Bang! went her gun.

She fired in the direction the detective had gone, and the recoil from the overloaded gun sent her flying backward from off her horse.

She got up screaming and swearing:

"I'll tear his eyes out yit. I'll tear his eyes out—see if I don't."

Jesse had by this time raised Frank in his arms.

"Frank?"

"What?"

"Are you hurt?"

"I don't know."

"Did your head strike?"

"Yes."

"I hope it's not bad."

"No."

Then Frank rubbed his head.

"Is he killed, Jess? Is he dead?" bawled Mrs. Samuels.

"No."

"Not hurt?"

"No."

"Good for him he ain't."

"Where is he?" asked Frank.

"Who?"

"The patent medicine man."

"Frank, don't you know who he is?"

"No."

"Carl Greene."

"What?"

"He is."

"Impossible!"

Frank was rapidly recovering himself.

"He is."

"And took us all in?"

"He did."

"Well, this beats all."

"I think it's a shame."

At this moment old man Samuels and John came up.

"What does all this mean?" the doctor asked.

"It means we have been duped."

"Duped?"

"Yes, sold," declared Jesse.

"Why were you runnin' away?"

"I couldn't help it."

"Why?"

"We were carried away."

"Carried away?"

"Yes—prisoners."

"Who did it?"

"Carl Greene."

"Carl Greene?"

"Yes."

"Why, has he been here?"

"Yes."

Jesse James then pointed to the wrecked buggy.

"Do you see that?"

"Yes."

"Don't you know what it is?"

"The old patent medicine man's buggy."

"Don't you know who the patent medicine man was?"

"Old Evans."

"But Old Evans was Carl Greene."

"Carl Greene?"

"Yes."

"Is it true?"

"Yes."

Then there was a lively scene.

The old doctor and his wife danced and gave vent to such expressions of rage as one seldom hears.

Frank James took the double-barreled shotgun from John Samuels, and mounting the horse flew along the road in hot pursuit of the detective.

But he did not come in sight of him any more that night.

The James Boys were in a few hours wholly recovered from their injuries.

They possessed constitutions of iron, and seldom met with a disaster that kept them long down.

Mounting their horses next morning at daylight, they bade their parents adieu and left home.

Both were disguised.

"Jesse, where are we going?" Frank James asked.

"I don't know."

"To Kentucky?"

"No."

"Why?"

"It's pretty hot for us in Kentucky."

"How would Texas do?"

Jesse reflected a moment and said:

"If we did not have to go through the Indian Territory we might."

"Can't you go through Arkansas?"

"We might."

"Let's do it."

"Well, we will think of it."

At noon they came to a little inland town, known as Hickory Ridge.

Hickory Ridge was an inland hamlet of nearly three hundred inhabitants. It was one of those places which are characteristically termed tough.

Half the stores were grog shops.

Drunken brawls were of daily occurrence.

A sheriff and four deputies had been killed in the town.

No detective, save Carl Greene, of Chicago, had ever been bold enough to venture inside the town.

Carl Greene, only six months before the opening of our story, had entered the town and arrested a notorious bravo called Buck Marion.

It was evening when the James Boys dismounted, as we have said, galloped into Hickory Ridge.

They rode up to the tavern and alighted.

"Wall, air yer goin' ter stay all night with me?" asked the bloated faced, red-headed landlord.

"Perhaps."

"Perhaps? Hain't yer made up yer minds?"

"No."

"Yer odd fish."

"We may be summoned to go on at any moment."

"Why?"

"On business."

"All right; don't yer be goin' erway afore yer pay yer bill; now d'ye understand?"

"Here is some security," and Jesse tossed a ten dollar bill toward the landlord. He snatched it up eagerly and said:

"Yer all O. K."

At this moment a little boy came running into the house.

"Git out o' here! Git out, all o' ye—quick!" he cried.

"What's the matter with ye, Joe?" asked the landlord.

"He's a-comin'! Git out, I say—git out!"

"Who's a-comin'?"

"Big Duke!"

"Land o' goshens! Now somebody'll be killed!"

Jesse James went forward to a window and saw a very singular sight.

Men, women and children were running in every direction as if chased by a mad dog.

Jesse could hardly divine the cause.

Turning to the landlord he asked:

"Do you know this Big Duke?"

The landlord was pale as a ghost and stood shaking in his boots.

Jesse James had to repeat the question before he answered: with chattering teeth.

"Y-y-yes."

"Who is he?"

"Er holy terror!"

"On the fight?"

"Yes."

"Kills a man occasionally for breakfast?"

"Yes."

"Well, I think he will have a tough time here."

"What do you mean?"

"Are you a friend of this Big Duke?"

"No—why?"

"Are you even an acquaintance?"

"Yes."

"Know him at sight?"

"I do."

"Well, go out and hunt him up. Now, don't stop until you find him, and tell him that if he has any regard for his future good health and prosperity that he must not bother about this hotel while I am here."

"Why?"

"Because I am bad myself."

"Oh, he will eat you alive."

"I'll lay heavy on his stomach if he does."

The landlord became very much exercised over the fate of Jesse James should he meet Big Duke.

"Come, stranger, I beg of you—oh, I implore you to spare yourself! Go away—don't come in contact with him."

"I want to shake his paw," said Jesse, quite coolly.

"Why, Big Duke has been a holy terror here and the dread of the whole country for years."

"Don't you want the scourge removed?" Jesse asked.

"Yes, yes, yes—that is—no!"

"Do you want that big scoundrel to be bullying you for years to come?"

"Well, no—"

"Then leave him to me."

"He'll kill you."

"Very well, I will run all chances on that score."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear! I believe this unfortunate man is determined to be killed. Oh, I know he is to be killed!"

"Don't worry yourself, my friend."

"Are you in love with death?"

"Not particularly; but I love danger."

"Well you are in a fair way to gratify yer passion."

"I love to humble bullies."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear, there he is—there he is even now!"

As he spoke he pointed to a window where a man was passing. He was a large, powerful man, with broad shoulders and a face inflamed with drink.

His eyes were small and wicked, and he had about him the air and manner of a bully.

Jesse watched him.

The man was much larger than he, and Jesse James was by no means a small man.

He came to the bar-room door, and entered.

"Whoopee—whar's the man as says I shan't come in?" he bawled.

"He's not here," cried the landlord.

"Hello, old Crokey Bill, is it you?"

"Yes."

"Come out and lem me smash ye one on the face. Whoopee! I want to fight."

Jesse James smiled and turned coolly about to Frank.

"What do you think of him?" he asked.

"I think he is an overboasting bully."

"So do I."

"I don't believe he is half as brave as he pretends to be."

"Nor I."

Then Jesse James said:

"My muscles feel pretty strong, and I believe I would enjoy giving him a hearty slap on the face."

"Would you?"

"Yes."

"Don't bring on a quarrel!"

"I will not, but I will not shrink from it if it is forced on me."

"That is right."

Then Jesse James coolly lit a cigar and began to smoke.

"Hello! Who's this 'ere dandy gerloot that comes ter smoke in the presence o' gentlemen?"

"Is smoking offensive to you, sir?" Jesse asked, as he coolly leaned against the counter.

"Yer het it air."

"Yes, it is to some," Jesse answered, without

making any effort to remove the cigar from his mouth.

"Why don't yer quit?" asked Big Duke.

"Quit what?"

"Quit smokin'."

"Because I want to smoke."

"Wall, yer will quit."

"I don't think I shall."

"Don't yer?"

"No."

"Looker hyar, yer don't know what kind of a salamander I am, do yer?"

"No."

"I am a walkin' tornado, I am! I am er rowdy from Bitter Creek!"

"Well, I knew you were something of that kind, but I did not know where you were from."

"Look you here, don't you give me any o' yer jaw, or by the holy poker I will chaw you right up, so I will! I won't leave so much as a greasy spot o' yer. D'yer hear me?"

"I'd have to be very deaf if I didn't."

"I mean all I say!"

"No doubt."

"Do you think I'm a greenhorn?"

"I've not thought anything about you."

"Haven't yer thort o' me?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because you are not worth thinking about."

"Whoop! Hooray! I'll show yer if I ain't! Look out now! I'm er comin'! Mountains tremble when I walk!"

Big Duke threw aside his coat and hat very much as if he meant business, and struck his fists together above his head in a way that made them crack.

"Whoop! Hooray!"

He jumped up, and down he came.

"Whoop! Hooray!"

Then he jumped up again and struck his heels together.

"I'm goin' ter giv yer all a bit o' amusement. Hyar's a man—a real man wot don't think I'm wuth thinkin' erbout. Oh, lemme at him!"

Jesse James, who was coolly smoking his cigar, said:

"I don't think there is anything to prevent your coming at me."

"Then hyar I come."

With that he raised his ponderous fist, that fist which had become the dread of all Hickory Ridge, and struck at Jesse.

Now Jesse James had been standing with his arms folded and his eyes on the floor when the blow was struck. There seemed to be nothing in the world to prevent the man from knocking him down.

Suddenly Jesse's arms flew apart as if on springs, and one parried the blow while the other planted another on the head and face of Big Duke just over the eye.

Duke spun round like a top.

Had he not caught at the door he would have gone down.

But after a moment he said:

"Beg yer parding, stranger—I beg yer parding. My foot slipped. Now I'm comin' at yer in earnest."

By this time the door and windows were crowded with spectators who had come to watch the scene.

They heard Big Duke utter a roar like an angry bull. They saw him leap forward, but the movements of the participants in the affray were so rapid that they could only see a mass of whirling arms.

Big Duke went backward with a force that threatened to crack the wall.

For a moment he lay stunned.

Then he got up.

"Whar's my pistol?"

"Duke—Duke, don't fight inside!" pleaded the landlord.

"Ther coward's efereed ter meet me outside."

"Come out and you'll see," cried Jesse.

When it was ascertained that the fight was to terminate in a pistol duel the excitement in the village grew far more intense.

Men hurried everywhere to see the sport.

Jesse James and Big Duke finally arranged that they were to take positions just at the outskirts of the town under two big oak trees, four hundred paces apart, and advance toward each other with a pistol in each hand.

They were to fire and load and fire until one or the other fell.

Duke was furious at his punishment and eager to get even with Jesse.

They took their positions and began to advance.

Frank James watched his brother with no little interest.

Bang! went one of Duke's pistols.

The bullet dug up the dirt close to Jesse's feet. He was still advancing.
Bang!
Another shot whistled past Jesse's side. It passed through his coat.
Bang!
Bang!
A bullet knocked off Jesse's hat.
Still Jesse had not fired.
Frank was vexed at his brother's delay.
Jesse had really not even cocked his revolver.
Jesse had resolved from the first to fire but one shot.

With hoot and yell the furious Big Duke came rushing toward Jesse James.

"I'm cock o' ther woods!" he yelled. "Whoop, hooray!"

Bang!
Bang!
Bang!

He emptied one pistol and flung it away.
Drawing a second, he was about to open fire with it when Jesse's right arm suddenly shot out as straight as an arrow.

There was a flash—a sharp report, and Big Duke halted.

He clapped his hand to his head, and sank slowly to the ground.

A few spasmodic kicks and all was over.

"You only fired one shot," said a by-stander.

"It was all he was worth," Jesse coolly answered.

Jesse and Frank James turned slowly about, mounted their horses and rode away.

It was well for them they did.

They had not been gone an hour before Carl Greene entered the town disguised as a cattle drover.

The town was wild with excitement and exultation over the death of Big Duke.

Carl Greene made some careful inquiries about the affair, and very soon satisfied himself that Jesse James was the stranger who slew the bully.

CHAPTER XVI.

CLARA HITE'S STORY.

"I WILL be at Spring Hill with valuable information." C.

The above is the contents of a note placed in Carl Greene's hands as he stood on the corner of a street in Lexington, Missouri.

Carl had traced the James Boys in their flight this far. He was rounding them up nicely, and there was every promise of being now able to capture them.

Jesse and Frank James were at this very moment hiding, either in Lexington, or the vicinity of Lexington.

"Spring Hill," he said to himself. "Where is Spring Hill?"

He knew that "C" was Clara Hite.

She had some matter of importance to communicate to him about the diamonds, no doubt.

"Well," he thought, "I must know all I can of the diamonds. I have been sent here to find those diamonds, not particularly to capture the James Boys."

Jesse James and Frank James might go, so far as the present expedition was concerned, if he could but get the diamonds.

Carl went to his hotel.

The clerk was in his place at the desk.

"Where is Spring Hill?" he asked.

"In Livingston County."

"That is north?"

"Northeast."

"It's the back track?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Does a train run to Spring Hill?"

"I think not."

"How near can I go there on a train?"

"To Chillicothe."

"Then to Chillicothe I go."

"When?"

"By the first train."

"One leaves in ten minutes."

"Can I catch it?"

"If you hurry you may. It's a long distance to the depot."

"There's a carriage."

The clerk hailed it.

Carl Greene was soon inside the vehicle, whirling away as rapidly as he could go to the depot.

The train was just ready to start, but by a dexterous spring he entered the car just as the wheels began to roll round.

The train pulled out.

He had no adventure until the train arrived at Chillicothe.

There he engaged a carriage to Spring Hill.

The distance was long, the roads rough, and it was quite dark when he reached Spring Hill.

It was one of those miserable, desolate-looking inland towns, situated among the woods, brakes and hollows.

The hills, the rocks, the ravines and the wild forests all seemed to be inhabited by spooks.

It had been a wild town—a wicked town, and even yet there was little civilization about it.

"Is there a hotel here?" asked Carl Greene of the driver of his carriage.

"Yes. Old Lem Goben keeps one."

"Drive to it."

The Goben Tavern was the largest house in Spring Hill.

A great, gloomy old house, which looked as if it might be haunted.

They went into the house and found Mr. Goben a rather intelligent, clean-shaven gentleman, tall and slender.

His wife was a large, sociable woman, with a pleasant face, calculated to make the temporary stay of the traveler at the house pleasant.

"Do you want to stay here to-night?" asked Mr. Goben.

"Yes, sir; I am to meet some one here—a friend on business."

"Man or woman?"

"I don't know yet."

"Don't know?" asked the amazed landlord.

"No, I can't say as I do," Carl Greene answered. Then he shrewdly added:

"They may send the man and they may send the woman."

He registered as "Mr. Felix Lane, Attorney at Law, Beatrice, Neb."

"Has any one come to meet me?" asked Carl.

"Well, there is a woman here from James Port, but I don't know what her business is or who she wants to see."

"I'll venture she is here to see me," said Carl.

"Don't know."

"Where is she?"

"In her room."

"Will you tell her I want to see her?"

"Yes."

The old man called to a tall, white-haired boy who was near, and said for him to go up to the room of Miss Belle Cuming and tell her a man would like to see her.

The tall, white-headed boy went, whistling to a long, lean hound to follow.

"Granison—Granison!"

"What, father?"

"Leave that dog alone. Can't you go nowhere without your dog?"

"No."

"Well, you can, sir. Just do you go on and leave the dog behind."

"Go back, Carlo!"

Carlo whined, and expressed his desire by his looks to go with Granison, but was too well disciplined to disobey.

After a few moments Granison came down.

"Well, what did she say?"

"She first wanted to know who he was."

"Did you tell her?"

"No, I didn't know his name."

"Well, what did she say then?"

"Asked me to describe him."

"Did you?"

"Yes."

"Well, what did she say then?"

"She just said that he was the feller she had come all the way to see."

"She is the one," said Carl Greene.

"Then go up."

Carl Greene went up a narrow, rickety sort of stairway to the top of the landing, where he halted and rapped with his knuckles on the door.

For a moment there was silence.

Again he rapped.

This time a little louder.

A low voice said:

"Come in!"

He opened the door.

There stood Mrs. Clara Hite at the opposite side of the room, her right hand behind her.

Carl entered the room carefully and closed the door behind him.

"Clara!" he said.

"Carl!"

"I have come."

He advanced and she extended her left hand to shake hands with him.

Wondering much at her strange manner, he laughingly seized her right hand and pulled it in front of her.

Then he saw the reason for her keeping her hand concealed.

In her right hand she held a cocked revolver.

"Why, Clara, what does this mean?"

"I did not know but that old Hite or some of the gang had got onto my coming here and had followed me."

"What would you have done?"

"Killed him sure."

"No, no; you would surely not."

Her pretty face became stern and she said:

"They have taught me not to value human life."

"Well, Clara, let us get to business," said Carl.

"All right."

She put up the pistol.

They sat down, and he said:

"You sent for me?"

"Yes."

"Have you any information for me?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I got something from Jesse concerning the diamonds."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Jesse has them."

"Where?"

"Buried in the ground."

"Are they?"

"Yes, but he intends to remove them."

"Where?"

"To his mother's."

"Mrs. Samuels?"

"Yes."

"That is bad."

"Why?"

"I doubt if we can get the old she dragon to give them up. I wish you could get them."

"But for Frank he would intrust them to me."

"What would you do with them?"

"Turn every one over to you."

"Would you, Clara?"

"Indeed I would."

"Good for you!"

Carl Greene then asked:

"Can't you induce him to intrust them to you for but a few moments?"

"Yes. He promised me I should see them."

"When?"

"Soon."

"Can't you fix a time?"

"Yes."

"And let me know?"

"I will."

"I will be on hand."

"Then you shall have a chance at the diamonds. But, Carl Greene, won't it be a terrible risk?"

"I am accustomed to such risks."

"Are you?"

"A detective must not be afraid of danger."

"I suppose not."

"I will be there. But won't you be afraid?"

said Carl Greene. "A meeting on such an occasion will be followed by dire disasters."

"I know it."

"Blood will run like water."

"Yes."

"Well, have you no fears—no dread?"

"Not now," she answered, slowly and solemnly. "The time was when I was as timid as most any girl. The time was when my heart was tender, but all that is past. I have suffered so much, seen so much, and experienced so much that I now have no fears of any person or thing. I seldom see one whose life I would turn a hand to save."

"Clara, you are a strange woman."

"Yes, I sometimes hardly know myself."

"I should think not."

"I really don't."

"You have lived a wild life?"

"Yes."

"How old are you?"

With a smile she answered:

"That is the one secret a woman keeps."

"But you are not so old that it need be a secret with you."

"I am twenty-three."

"How long have you been married to old man Hite?"

"Two years."

"You are surely ill-matched."

"I hate him!" she said, grinding her pretty teeth.

"Tell me how you came to marry him?" said Carl Greene.

"In order to do that, I will be compelled to tell you the story of my life."

"Well, tell me."

"As I once told you, I am a New York girl. My father was a stage carpenter, and used to go with him to the theaters and watch him making all the curious machinery which produces such strange and illusive effects to the people who see them from the front."

As I grew up I knew but little save of the stage.

"To me there seemed no other way of earning an honest living."

"Quite natural."

"When I was nine years old I was quite bright, and soon became a favorite at father's theater."

"With the actors?"

"Yes, sir. One time they wanted a child in the play. The child which had been engaged was down with diphtheria."

"Some one suggested that the little girl of the stage carpenter's might do."

"The stage manager sent for me."

"I went and he gave me the part. I could scarce read it, but my mother taught me it in a short time, and when it came to the first rehearsal, I did not need to be prompted at all."

"Was it a long part?"

"Quite long for a child's part."

"And you went through it without a failure?"

"Without a failure."

"The stage manager praised me for my success, and I was ready for my first appearance that night."

"To me it was the great event of my life. I was dressed in fairy costume, and when the great curtain rolled up and I appeared, I was received with tremendous applause."

"The theater shook from pit to gallery with cheers, and I was the attraction."

"From that time on I was doomed for the stage."

"I began to study for it in earnest."

"An old actor took me in training and I was soon proficient in the art."

"Engagements were not difficult to get and before I was fifteen I earned more money than my father ever had."

"I grew up to be the queen of the stage."

"Being a great singer and dancer and finding that I could earn more on the variety stage, I adopted it."

"My success was amazing. In a few months my name was known everywhere."

"Three years ago I was summering at Long Branch. I was now able to hire my own cottage. My parents were dead and I, alone, without any relative and plenty of money, naturally became reckless and extravagant."

"While at Long Branch I met a tall, fine looking gentleman, who seemed at once attracted to me."

"He was a dashing fellow. He had plenty of money and was quite free with it."

"He sported diamonds, and of all things I adore diamonds most."

"The result was I fell in love with him."

"What was his name?"

"The name I knew him by was T. J. Jackson."

"Was it his real name?"

"No; but of that you shall hear all in good time."

"Proceed."

"Well, to make a long story short, he told me he loved me."

"Were you engaged?"

"Not exactly. He told me he lived in Kansas City, and asked me to come and meet him."

"Did you?"

"Yes—and there I learned who he was."

"And he was Jesse James, was he not?"

"Yes."

"He deceived you."

"Yes, for here I learned he was a bandit chief and had a wife. I would not have cared for that had he been willing to give up his wife, but he would not."

Carl Greene could not help mentally exclaiming:

"So much for the credit of Jesse James!"

"I was three weeks with the outlaw's band before I knew it. Then when I learned who they were I was possessed of a spirit of recklessness and did not care what I did."

"Old man Hite was there. He was very kind to me and I married him."

"I soon learned to hate Jesse James, and now I live only to be avenged on him, which I will, come what may."

Carl Greene listened to the woman's story, and though he was disgusted with such a cruel person as she was, he had to admit that she was a useful auxiliary to him and he could hardly get along without her.

He made arrangements with her to induce Jesse to bring the diamonds to her, then she was by a signal to let him know.

He left her, went to his room, and two hours before day was in his buggy, being driven at full speed to Chillicothe, where he intended to take the train for Lexington to resume his search for the James Boys.

Carl Greene felt sleepy, was reclining in the

buggy almost asleep, when the vehicle came to a sudden halt.

"Stop! stand and deliver!" cried a voice that was familiar to him.

It was Jesse James.

CHAPTER XVII.

OLD SAM DENTON.

THE James Boys were in Lexington when Carl Greene received his message calling him to Spring Hill.

Livingston and Daviess Counties had suffered much from the ravages of the James Boys. They had plundered and robbed all along the borders and far in the interior.

Jesse in disguise saw Carl Greene board the train and leave.

As Carl had not taken time to procure a ticket, they of course knew not whither he had gone.

Frank James was at the hotel.

Jesse hastened to him with the news of the sudden departure of Carl Greene.

"Where did he go, Jesse?"

"I don't know."

"I'll bet it was a sudden call to Chicago."

"Do you think it was?"

"I believe it."

"Well, I believe I will see into it."

"But look here, Jesse."

Frank James handed Jesse a newspaper.

It was the Lexington Caucasian.

The item to which he referred was as follows:

"A GREAT FIND!

"Mr. Goben, of Spring Hill, Said to Have

"Discovered

"A FORTUNE

"Buried by Some One During the War!"

Of course these flaming headlines attracted Jesse's attention at once.

He began to read the item below.

The article said that Mr. Lem Goben, living at Spring Hill, Missouri, had unearthed an enormous amount of money buried near or at Spring Hill.

The article described Mr. Goben as a peculiar man, always groping about, digging in odd places, looking for things which had been hidden away.

Mr. Goben had kept the secret of his find to himself, but there were friends and relatives who shrewdly guessed it all, and there could be no doubt but that he was now in possession of at least a million in gold.

He had been asked why he did not deposit it in the bank, but had answered that he was fearful of being robbed by the James Boys.

When Jesse had read it through, Frank asked:

"What do you think of it?"

"I believe it's all a lie."

"Do you?"

"Yes."

"Well, you know old Lem Goben?"

"Oh, yes, I should think I did."

"He is always poking about hunting for things."

"Yes."

"Well, he might find a treasure."

"But if he did find it he would be the last person to tell one."

"But don't you see he hasn't told it."

Jesse glanced at the paper.

"No, he hasn't."

"Now, it's true."

"Well, Frank, what good does it do us?"

"None, if we stay here. But, Jesse, what's to hinder our going to Spring Hill, disguised, and robbing the old fool?"

"But he will have it in a bank."

"Read this article again and see if you are awake!" cried Frank, angry at Jesse's stupidity.

Jesse read it.

"Don't you read in it somewhere that old Lem won't put it in the bank?"

"Yes."

"Don't you know him?"

"Yes."

"Then you will know the article is right."

"Yes."

"Now, why do you deny the advisability of going and robbing him?"

"Oh, I will go."

"Then let us take the next train."

Jesse went to the hotel clerk and asked:

"When can we get a train for Pittsburg?"

"In two hours."

Two hours to wait.

They whiled away the time with cards.

When the time came they took the train.

Their horses, Shoe and Jim Malone, were to be sent overland to Stewartsville.

The James Boys reached Chillicothe, and without waiting for their own horses, bought two more, and set out for Spring Hill.

They did not get started until midnight, and consequently it was they who met Carl Greene's buggy coming back.

When they saw the vehicle approaching them Jesse said:

"Who is that?"

"I don't know."

"It must be a doctor returning from the bedside of some sick patient."

"It may be."

"Or it might be old Goben."

"What would he be doing here?"

"Carrying off his treasure."

"Whoever it is, let us rob him."

"Agreed."

Carl Greene was hardly awake when he saw a pistol poked in his face and heard the voice of Jesse James say:

"Stand and deliver!"

But being thus rudely awakened threw him into a rage.

He snatched a pistol from his belt and cocked it.

Jesse heard rather than saw the movement.

"Fool, die!" he hissed.

Bang!

So near was the pistol to Carl's face that it actually burned his cheek.

Bang! went his own pistol.

Jesse struck down his arm.

The ball struck his horse in the neck and ranged down to the animal's heart.

The horse sank down dead, and Jesse James was thrown head first against the wheel of the buggy.

His head struck with such force as to make the wheel crack and stun Jesse James.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Frank James, who had kept a little aloof at this sudden and unexpected resistance, opened fire on the unknown man in the buggy.

Carl's driver, half dead with fear and dread, began to lay on the whip.

The frightened horses leaped forward at a dangerous speed. The buggy flew over the uneven ground and rushed on like the wind.

"Kill him, Frank!" roared Jesse, trying to rise.

Frank James clapped spurs to his horse and pursued the flying buggy.

He fired shot after shot in such rapid succession that the bullets rattled like hail through the top of the buggy.

Carl Greene and the driver bent over and so escaped without a shot.

Carl Greene thrust his pistol back out of the buggy and fired four or five shots in succession.

Of course, flying as he did over the rough ground, the shots were almost wholly at random.

But one struck Frank's horse in the center of the forehead and the animal fell dead.

Both the James Boys were dismounted.

Frank had just extricated his foot from the stirrup, when Jesse James arose and came to him.

"Frank, are you hurt?"

"No."

"By Jove, Frank, we caught a Tartar that time!"

"So it seems."

"I wish we knew who he was."

"I don't know; but it wasn't old Goben."

"No."

After a moment Frank James asked:

"Jess, didn't you see his face?"

"Not plain enough to tell who he was."

"Were there two?"

"Yes, but only one did the shooting."

"Was it the driver?"

"No—the other fellow."

"Well, what shall we do?"

"Go back to Chillicothe."

"On foot?"

"Yes."

After a few moments studying the stars, Jesse James said:

"I believe we can make it before daylight."

"Well, then, that's the place for us to be."

They went to Chillicothe.

It was a long, dark walk, but they reached the town before daylight.

Jesse and Frank had a friend living near the suburbs of the town, who was always ready to shield and protect them.

It still lacked some time to daylight, when two pedestrians paused at his door.

They rapped.

"Who is there?" asked a voice.
 "Jack, Jack!" said Jesse.
 "Who are you?"
 "Don't you know me, Jack? It's Jesse."
 "Jesse—Jesse James?"
 This was asked in a whisper.
 "Yes."
 In a moment the door was opened.
 It was a friendly face which greeted them.
 "Who is that with you?"
 "Frank."
 "Come in, boys."
 No sooner were they inside than Jack asked:
 "Well, what do you boys want?"
 "We want to stay here awhile."
 "Are the mud-sills after you?"
 "No."
 "But you expect 'em?"
 "We don't know, but we want to be protected and kept out of their reach if they should come."
 "Well, I'll do all I can."
 "Jack, you shall never lose by your friendship for us."
 "If you should be caught at my house I would lose."
 "Let us not be caught."
 "I hope not."
 Jesse then suggested that if he had any quiet little out of the way room about the house they might find shelter in it, and he said he had the very thing.
 "What is it?"
 "A room in the attic. I have just had it fixed up."
 "For us?"
 "No, not exactly. The truth is, it is such a snug little apartment that one might search the house over a dozen times and never find it."
 "Take us to it."
 They were conducted to the top floor and there, in an angle of the house, Mr. Jack Scott pushed back a sliding panel and revealed a concealed stairway.
 It was so narrow but one person could squeeze up it at a time.
 They went up the stairway and found a neat little attic room, with a bed large enough for two.
 Here they stayed three days unperceived by any one.
 At last they determined to quit their present abode and go to their horses, which as the reader knows, had been sent to Stewartsville, on the Hannibal & St. Joe Railroad.
 "How had we better go, Jesse?"
 "Take the train."
 Frank shook his head.
 "Not the train."
 "No."
 "Why?"
 "I tell you, Jesse, the road is closely watched."
 "Who watches it?"
 "Carl Greene."
 "How do you know?"
 "I saw him."
 "When?"
 "Yesterday."
 "Yesterday?"
 "Yes."
 Jesse James was thunderstruck.
 "Why, how did you see him, Frank?"
 "I was looking from the attic window and saw a man."
 "I thought there was something about him quite familiar, and I got a spy-glass and began to look at him more closely."
 "And you recognized him?"
 "Yes."
 "Why didn't you tell me?"
 "I did not think it was worth while then."
 "Well, if we don't go by rail shall we walk?"
 "No."
 "How?"
 "Let us hire some one to take us."
 Jesse James thought that there might be some objection to this.
 He was quite sure that the detective might be guarding the livery stables also.
 "If he has us penned up, as he certainly seems to have, why we might as well make up our minds to it that he has not forgotten the livery stables, barns and every other means of escape."
 "Let us start out on the north side as soon as it is dark, and go on until we meet some farmer with a wagon."
 The idea just suited, and the James Boys resolved to put it in practice.
 They kept quiet until the sun set, and then they stole away from the house.
 They seldom or never encumbered themselves with baggage.

Just as they were quitting the town they saw a man a little past middle age, with a grizzled beard, in his shirt-sleeves, standing at the side of the street.

"Do you live in town?" Jesse James asked.
 "No, but I live nigh."
 "Are you a farmer?"
 "No, I haul wood an' stum."
 "What is your name?"
 "They call me ole Sam Denton."
 "Have you a team?"
 "Yes, I've got er good un."
 "Where?"
 "Wall, et air down at Zack Hennen's now. Ain't been doin' much fer some time, but we he goin' ter haul rock ter-morrer."
 "Say, Sam!"
 "Wall, say it yerself; yer mouth's open."
 "Would you like to earn a few dollars?"
 "Bet I would!"
 "Now, how would you like to earn ten dollars before morning?"
 "I'd like et er most dog goned well."
 "Would you?"
 "Yes."
 "Well, you can!"
 Sam leaped up into the air, cracked his heels together, and asked:
 "How?"
 "Can your team make it to Stewartsville?"
 "Yes; I kin git Zack Hennen's light wagon an' go. D'yer want ter go thar?"
 "Yes."
 "Why dun yer go by rail?"
 "We want you to take us."
 "Fer ten dollars?"
 "Yes."
 "An' ye'll gin me ten dollars?"
 "Yes."
 "All right."
 Sam turned about three or four times and said:

"Kin yer wait here till I go an' git Zack's wagon?"

Now Jesse and Frank James knew full well that it would not do to wait there on the street. If they did wait long they would be sure to be seen, and perhaps Carl Greene or some of his agents might discover them.

"Sam, can't you take us to your house?" asked Jesse.

"No."
 "Why?"
 "It's too fur."
 "How far is it?"
 "Two miles an' a half at least; but say, ef yer don't want ter stay liyar, I tell yer jist wot yer mought do."

"What?"
 "Yer kin go ter Gains' grocery an' wait until I come by fur yer."
 "Where is that?"

He pointed to a little building standing at the outer edge of the town.

The James Boys went to it and entered.
 They bought some cigars, and sat on cracker boxes smoking, while they gazed out on the white, dusty road and the farmers' wagons rolling by.

It seemed a long time before Sam Denton came.

In fact, it was quite dark. An hour had passed and Jesse James was growing quite uneasy.

"I wish the infernal rascal would come," he declared.

"Well, here he is," said Frank.

At this moment Sam put his head into the grocery, and said:

"Air yer ready?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FIERCE STRUGGLE.

"Yes," cried Jesse James, angrily.
 "Why didn't you come an hour ago?" Frank asked.

"Oh, I had an awful time a-findin' my horses, and then Zack he looked ez if he didn't keer erbout lettin' his wagin go."

"Didn't he?"
 "Not er bit; I'll hev ter pay half I git for it."

"I'd rather double your pay than wait. Come, drive on!" said Jesse.

The proprietor of the grocery gave Jesse James a curious glance, and then looked at Sam Denton.

All were alike strangers to him.

Had Jesse James known that Sam Denton had bought both the wagon and horses, and that in the purchase he displayed an extraordinary amount of loose change for a common wood-cutter, he would have opened his eyes in amazement.

Sam Denton had also held a confidential con-

versation with a man whom he had sent ahead down the road on some errand.

All this would have rendered Jesse James and Frank somewhat incredulous as to the identity of Samuel Denton.

"Come, git in," said Sam.

"Say, Sam, you have a pretty good team."

"Middlin' like."

"I hope they are fast."

"Wall, tollerable like."

"Get them to movin'."

"I must git some terbacker."

Sam called to the grocer and told him to bring him a plug of tobacco.

He brought it.

Sam paid for it and started his horses.

They jogged along at a tolerable rate of speed.

"Do you know how far it is to Stewartsville by this road?" Jesse James asked.

"I don't know exactly," Sam answered.

"Can we reach the town before daylight?"

"Oh, yes."

"Sure?"

"Like er top."

"I suppose you have been on this road before?"

"Yes."

Sam Denton took a chew of tobacco.

"Often?"

"Wall, not very often," Sam answered.

"You don't think there is any danger of your becoming lost?"

"Oh, no. I reckon not."

Still Jesse James felt uneasy. He was convinced that something was going wrong.

Sam Denton's horses jogged along over the hard-beaten road. The old wagon rattled along at a shambling rate, and the driver occasionally chucked to his horses, or slapped them with his long leather lines.

"Say, Denton, can't you get a little more speed out of these horses?" asked Jesse James.

"Duu know, boss; one's got er drive a leetle keerful, yer know, when they've got er long way ter go."

"But we won't reach Stewartsville before noon to-morrow."

The bandits were growing decidedly impatient. They were anxious to be on their way to the town where they were to meet their horses.

Once mounted on Siroc and Jim Malone and they felt that they would be able to bid defiance to Carl Greene.

But Carl Greene was in the neighborhood. They were on foot and their condition was precarious.

They determined to urge the driver to get greater speed out of his horses.

"Mr. Denton!" said Jesse, firmly but respectfully.

"Yes, sir."

"You must drive faster."

"Git up, Nell! Dick, go on!"

"That won't do."

"Wot d'yer want?"

"If you don't drive faster we shall be forced to take the lines from your hands and drive ourselves."

"Wall now, by hokey, old feller, when it comes ter old Sam Denton er givin' up his horses ye'll know wot's wot."

"If you don't drive faster we will take the lines."

"D'yer want a tussle with me?"

"No."

"Try it an' ye'll git one."

"Maybe you don't know who we are, Sam?"

"No, I don't."

"If you did know, you might be afraid of us."

"No, I wouldn't."

"Why, we are holy terrors."

"Be yer?"

"Yes."

"Wall, I'm jist an airthquakin tornado, I am."

"Is that so?"

"Yer bet it air."

"Why, when we kick, mountains tremble."

"Air it so?"

"It's a fact."

"Yer dun know ther kind o' a hairpin I am."

"No, I don't."

"I am er kind wot eats currycombs, drink akerfortis, picks my teeth with the butt cut o' a shell-bark hickory. I stood on the Rocky Mountains, washed my shirt in the Pacific Ocean, an hung et on ther equinoxial line ter dry!"

Jesse James, amused at the boasting of the teamster, said:

"You are somewhat of a liar yourself."

"Yer bet I am."

"Are you as noted a liar as you seem?"

"I am inore so."

"Yes, I believe it."

"Git up, yer lazy critters!"
The horses jogged along at an easy gait.
Jesse and Frank James grew more and more impatient.

They sat in the seat behind the teamster, and as the wagon rattled on, Jesse asked:

"Do you think he is a fool?"

"No."

"I don't like him."

"Don't you?"

"No."

"Well, I don't."

"Do you suppose he is honest?"

"Well, he will take all he can get. There is no doubt of that."

"I believe he is not what he seems."

"Not a teamster?"

"No."

"What is he, then?"

"I don't know."

"I think he is just a bit too smart, and when we get to the town I believe I'll give him a whipping."

"I wish you would."

"He deserves it."

"Of course."

Meanwhile the driver was urging his horses along while he whistled a merry tune. His eyes were on the dark road and he seemed to be paying no heed whatever to the conversation of the outlaws.

But careless as he seemed not a word they said escaped his ears.

He urged his horses on, but did not increase his speed.

Suddenly the clatter of horses' hoofs were heard behind them.

"Frank!" whispered Jesse.

"Jesse!"

Both drew pistols.

"I don't like that."

Sam Denton looked behind him, and Jesse James asked:

"Who is that coming?"

"I'd like ter know how I know?"

The James Boys held their cocked pistols in their hands, while the man who was riding behind them galloped past the wagon and dashed on.

"Now, wot war erbont that air feller terskeer yer?" asked Sam.

"We didn't know but that he was a robber," said Jesse, putting up his pistol.

"One o' the James Boys?"

"Yes."

"Wall, he warn't."

"I thought maybe he was."

"Why, ther James Boys hev left ther town an' country."

"Since when?"

"Since three days ergo."

"How do you know?"

"Wall, thar war er feller hyar er-watchin' fur 'em."

"Who?"

"Some sed he war er detective from Chercago."

"Was he?"

"Yes."

"Did you know his name?"

"No, but I hearn o' it once."

"What was it?"

"Suthin' very like Greene. I reckon ther name was Greene, but thar war suthin' afore it."

"Carl Greene?"

"Guess that air it, but I dun know all erbout it, yer know. I can't say, 'cause I am not sartin erbout it."

Jesse James and Frank were now convinced that their driver was a wiser man than they supposed him to be.

The horses jogged on, and the night wore away.

Jesse and Frank sat in the seat behind the driver.

The night was cool, and the outlaws wrapped their cloaks about them, and leaning back in the seat, each began to doze.

The moon had gone down, and only the dim, pale stars far in the distance, shone upon the earth, giving forth just light enough for them to see how to travel.

Jesse James was really asleep.

Frank was dozing and the horses jogging along, when a man suddenly leaped from the side of the road.

He had a horse tied to a bush at the roadside, as any one could see, had they been looking.

He suddenly sprang toward the wagon.

He was a strong, athletic man.

The driver saw him, but he never for a moment slackened or increased his slow pace. On, on and on they drove.

Suddenly and lightly the stranger sprang upon

the wagon, and placing one foot inside next to Jesse, seized him.

"Surrender!"

Instantly a wonderful change came over the scene.

The driver, who had been known as Sam Denton, threw on the brakes, reined back the horses, and dashing off his disguise drew his revolver.

He was Carl Greene, the irrepressible detective.

"Surrender!" he cried.

"Jesse!"

"Frank!"

"Betrayed!"

"Trapped!"

"Surrender!"

"Never!"

"Take that!"

Whack!

Carl Greene struck at Frank with the butt end of his whip.

But Frank James was as active as an athlete.

He saw the motion and interpreted the design.

Though taken by surprise the James Boys were by no means confused.

They from the very instant that the detective demanded their surrender knew it was Carl Greene.

Frank James dodged the blow, which fell with a whack on the wagon seat, and he threw himself out backward from the seat and fell upon the ground.

Bang!

As Frank went flying through the air he drew his revolver, and scarce had his feet touched the earth ere he fired.

The ball grazed the face of Carl Greene.

He raised his pistol and fired at Frank.

Frank dodged under the wagon and the bullet struck the ground, raising a cloud of dust.

Jesse James was meanwhile having a desperate fight with the man who had seized him.

It will be necessary, in order that the reader may fully understand this story, to explain who this valiant assistant of Carl Greene was.

He was a famous Chicago detective, Paul Keene.

Paul Keene and Carl Greene had often worked together. Each knew the other to be brave, and that he could be depended upon under any and all circumstances.

Carl Greene, when he learned that the James Boys were in Chillicothe, had telegraphed for Keene, who with his son, Virgil Keene, also a famous detective, was in St. Louis.

Paul Keene hastened to Chillicothe, and on the evening in question he and Carl Greene had arranged for the attack on the James Boys on the road after Jesse, supposing Carl to be a teamster, had employed him to take them to Stewartsville.

Paul Keene was a big, stout man.

He threw all his strength into the contest.

Having seized Jesse from behind, he had the advantage.

Jesse had a revolver in his hand.

But Paul Keene kept the muzzle of it pointed away from him.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

The bullets whizzed into the bushes at the roadside.

One passed through the side of the wagon below the seat and did not miss the head of Frank James two inches.

Jesse had come very nearly killing his brother.

"Paul, can you manage him?" asked Carl Greene.

"I believe so. Where is the other?"

"Under the wagon."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Well, keep him there."

Bang!

From under the wagon Frank James fired a shot.

The bullet perforated the bottom of the vehicle and passed up between the toes of Carl Greene.

He threw off the brakes and cried:

"Get up!"

The horses leaped forward.

Carl's revolver was in his right hand, and as soon as Frank was uncovered by the wagon he intended to shoot him.

But Frank James was too shrewd for that.

He seized the coupling pole and swung himself under the wagon.

Frank could have continued to fire upward

and perhaps might have killed or disabled both of the detectives, but he feared to do so as he might kill or wound his own brother.

Jesse and Paul Keene were having a terrific struggle in the wagon.

Down on the bottom they rolled and fought.

Paul wrung Jesse's pistol from his hand and threw it away. Jesse drew another.

Then commenced a terrible fight over that.

They fought and struggled like demons.

Carl Greene had his hands full to watch the horses and keep them from running away, and also keep a lookout for Frank James.

"Paul, how are you making out?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"Haven't you got the handcuffs on him yet?"

"No."

"Woa!"

With his hand of iron he reined back the horses and then tied the lines to the brake which he threw on.

The wagon was stopped.

Carl Greene then drew a pair of handcuffs and turned to assist Paul Keene in handcuffing the outlaw.

At this moment Frank James, having released the coupling pole of the wagon, suddenly climbed up over the seat and presented his pistol at Carl Greene's head.

At this instant the horses, from some unaccountable reason, took fright.

They leaped and plunged, destroying the brake and snapping the reins.

Bang!

Frank fired, but was jolted, so he missed.

Next instant the horses ran away.

Away like the wind they flew.

Frank James clung for a few moments to the side of the wagon, then his hands gave out, and he fell.

A wheel struck his shoulder, glanced from his head, and he was unconscious.

Down the road to the bridge flew the maddened horses.

Carl Greene, Paul Keene, and Jesse James were so mixed up in the wagon they could not tell friend from foe.

At last the vehicle struck the bridge.

There was a crash—a swaying.

Then a thundering plunge, and both Carl Greene and Paul were hurled to the waters below, mixed and mingled with the wrecked wagon and the struggling horses.

CHAPTER XIX.

FATE OF WOOD HITE.

JESSE JAMES had fallen out of the wagon before it reached the bridge.

When he recovered he found himself lying at the roadside.

Jesse rose and rubbed his head.

"That was a narrow escape," said the bandit king. "I wonder where Frank is?"

He remembered now that the struggle had commenced some distance up the road.

Jesse had only one revolver left, but that was loaded. He felt that he was not altogether unarmed.

Jesse went slowly up the road to where he had last seen Frank.

He found his brother sitting up in the road.

"Frank!"

"Jesse!"

"Have you any bones broken?"

"No, I believe not."

"Well, let us go."

"Where?"

"To Stewartsville after our horses."

Frank James rose to his feet and brushed the dust from his clothes.

"Frank, how many pistols have you?"

"Three."

"I only have one."

"What became of the others?"

"Scattered along the road everywhere."

"Jesse, where are those fellows?"

"I don't know. The horses ran away and I tumbled out."

"Did you?"

"Yes."

"Who were they, Jesse?"

"One was Carl Greene."

"Yes, he was the driver. There was no doubt of that, but I was not quite sure of the other fellow."

"He was Paul Keene."

"Two of the most desperate detectives in the world."

"Yes."

"Well, I suspected it was those two. I wish we had only known it, we would have killed them."

Jesse James shook his head.

"No, Frank," he said, "I don't believe that Carl Greene was ever born to be killed by a bullet."

"Don't you?"

"No—hello, here come horsemen! What does it mean? This way, Frank. Let us get out of their way."

They got out of the road into some bushes at the side.

Six horsemen galloped up to the scene.

"Halt!" said one.

All came to a standstill.

Then the man who seemed to be leader of the cavalcade said:

"I see nothing."

"No," another responded.

"Say, boys, who could have fired those shots?"

"Don't know."

"I wonder if Jesse and Frank are in the neighborhood?"

"They may be."

"But I tell you I saw Carl Greene at Chilli-cothe yesterday. They told me he came this way and I want to kill him."

Jesse James pinched Frank's arm and whispered:

"Frank, it's Wood Hite."

"And our boys?"

"Yes."

"Well, let us make ourselves known."

Jesse James then placed a whistle to his mouth and blew a shrill blast.

"Jesse's whistle, boys!" cried Wood Hite.

In a minute's time Jesse and Frank James were shaking hands with Wood Hite, Jim Cummins, Dick Little, Bob Ford, Charley Ford and Bill Chadwell.

"Where have you been?" Jesse asked.

"We have been running about the country, trying to get together some of the boys," said Wood.

"Why?"

"The Plattsburg bank is just bursting over with money. It needs some relieving, and we thought we would find you and do it. What have you been doing?"

"Fighting two of the worst detectives in the world."

"Who?"

"Carl Greene and Paul Keene."

"Where are they?"

"I don't know."

Jesse James then told all about them that he knew, and they went down the road in search of the detectives.

The broken bridge, a pair of drowned horses and a wrecked wagon were all they could find.

Jesse James thought the detectives had escaped, but some were of the opinion they had drowned in the stream and floated away. Jesse asked:

"Boys, where shall we go?"

"Let us go to Hite's."

"And rest a few days?"

"Yes."

"But if Carl Greene lives he may follow us there."

"He will not be likely to do so."

After some persuasion they induced Jesse James to go to Hite's.

They all went to Stewartsville first, where Jesse and Frank got their horses and then the gallop to the home of old Hite was very easily made.

"Jesse, you have come back," said Mrs. Hite, on greeting the bandit.

"Yes."

"I am so glad."

"Why, Clara?"

"Now you will show the diamonds to me, won't you?"

"Yes. But, Clara, you have not said anything to any one about them, have you?"

"No!"

"Sure?"

"I have not, honest—"

"Very well. I will talk with you after supper."

It was almost sunset when the bandits reached the house of Wood Hite.

The building stood back some distance from the road.

Jesse had put out spies and sentries to notify them of the approach of any one.

After supper Jesse went up to the room of Clara Hite.

She was alone.

"I have been so anxious for you to come back, Jesse," she said, with a smile.

Clara Hite was playing a very deep, cunning game.

Jesse James, shrewd as he was, little dreamed how deep the game was.

"Did you want to see me or the diamonds most?" he asked.

"You."

She laughed.

"I don't believe it, Clara."

"Oh, Jesse!"

"It was the diamonds."

"No, no! You wrong me."

"Do I?"

"Yes, you do; but now that you are here I do so want to talk with you about the diamonds."

Jesse laughingly said:

"I believe that is a theme of which you will never tire."

"You are correct."

"Well, what do you want to know about them, Clara?"

"Everything."

"What first?"

"Whose diamonds are they?"

"They are the old Zig Johnson family diamonds."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, and are quite famous."

"I have seen old Zig."

"In New York?"

"Yes."

"He was a miser."

"Yes, one of the worst."

"How long did you know him?"

"Oh, I was never very well acquainted with him."

"Were you not?"

"No. I never even had a speaking acquaintance. I just knew him when I saw him."

"That was all?"

"Yes."

"Well, you knew, of course, that he was a monomaniac on the subject of diamonds?"

"Yes."

"He was constantly hoarding them up."

"So I have often heard."

"Well, this collection of diamonds represents some of the most valuable in the world."

"Do they?"

"Crowned heads have worn them."

"Is it possible?"

"It is."

"Well, I am so anxious to see them."

"I know you are eager, Clara."

"Won't you bring them here?"

"Yes—but, Clara, if the boys knew I had two million dollars worth of diamonds don't you know they would make me divide?"

"They shall never know it."

"I will divide with you, Clara, but not with them."

"Won't you?"

"No. There is no need of their knowing it."

"No."

"But won't you tell Hite?"

"No."

"Why, do you keep secrets from your husband?"

"Yes," she laughingly answered, "I tell him no secrets at all."

"That is right. But do you keep any from me?"

"No."

She smiled.

Jesse James believed her. Clara tried to look pleasant, but she had beneath that smile all the black hatred of a demon. Clara Hite despised Jesse James, and she determined to ruin his life, thwart his most cherished plans, and be the cause of his death.

"Jesse, you must let me see all the diamonds."

"I promise you you shall."

"How many?"

"Two millions of dollars worth at least," he answered.

"What a grand sight!"

"It is a grand sight, Clara. Oh! such a sight one seldom sees, but you shall have the pleasure of seeing them."

"And you killed George Brighton to get them?"

"Oh, no; his wife, Sarah Brighton, shot him, while I did the same for Nick Carleton. They were blacked as negroes and intended to rob the woman, so the husband would not be suspected."

"It was quite a scheme."

"Yes, it certainly was."

"But it failed?"

"Yes."

"And you were the only one who profited by it."

"So far I am, but you shall profit also."

"It's a wonder the woman would let you bring away the jewels."

"She would not have let me bring them had she been conscious."

"Did you knock her down?"

"Oh, no! When she discovered that she had killed her husband, she fell down in a dead

swoon, and knew no more so long as I stayed there."

"What became of her?"

"She is in a madhouse in St. Joe."

Jesse James then told her how he had taken the jewels away from the house after the men were shot, and carried them off to a place where he secreted them.

"When can I see them?" she asked.

Jesse reflected a moment.

"What day is this?" he asked.

"Sunday."

"Next Friday night at nine o'clock. I will send all the boys away, and then I'll bring the diamonds to you so you can select such as you want yourself."

"Oh, thank you."

Jesse James went to the door. As he opened it he thought he saw a dark shadow disappear down the hallway.

"I do wonder if some of the vagabonds were eavesdropping?" he thought. "I would kill any one if I knew he had been eavesdropping me."

Jesse James was not certain that any one had been eavesdropping, and consequently he said nothing to any one about seeing the shadow in the hallway.

Late that evening Wood Hite accosted Jesse James and said:

"Jesse, I want a word with you in private."

"What have you to say?" said Jesse, conducting him to his apartment and sitting down.

"Jesse, I want a part o' the divvy."

"What divvy?"

"Diamonds."

Jesse James opened wide his eyes.

"Oh, yer know what I mean, don't yer?"

"Hardly."

"Jesse, I heard ye and Clara—I heard every word ye said."

"So it was you who were eavesdropping at that door?"

"Yes."

"You heard all?"

"Every word."

There was an evil gleam in the eyes of Jesse James. It was a dangerous glance.

But Wood Hite, who sat with his hand in his coat pocket resting on a cocked pistol, had no fear of him. He merely smiled.

Wood Hite was a dead shot, and could kill the bandit king before he could make a move to draw a weapon.

Such was not Jesse James' intention.

He had a more desperate, a more terrible scheme in mind.

Jesse was cunning and treacherous, and he resolved to dispose of Wood Hite on that very night.

"I won't do it myself," he thought, "but I know a way to have it done."

He went to Dick Little as soon as he left Wood Hite.

Jesse thought.

"Wood Hite knows too much. He must die."

"Dick, have you and Wood Hite made up your quarrel yet?" he asked.

"No."

"You still hate each other, do you?"

"Yes."

"Dick?"

"What, Jesse?"

"I am a friend of yours."

"Well, I have always thought you were."

"Now, Dick, I want to give you a word of warning."

"What is it?"

"Look out for Wood Hite."

"Does he mean me harm?"

"I have learned enough to know that Wood Hite contemplates killing you."

"When?"

"To-night."

"This night?"

"Well, if an opportunity affords itself, he will."

"Very well," said Dick Little, gruffly. "I will give him a chance to do so."

"I hope you won't let him get the advantage of you."

"Jesse, your orders are so strict against quarreling."

"Well, Dick Little, I should never punish any one for killing Wood Hite, when I know it is his intention to kill you."

Dick growled:

"I'll make a corpse of him!"

"Wood says you are afraid of him."

"Me afraid of him! He is a liar and a coward!"

This last was said loud enough for Frank James, who was at the door, to hear him.

Frank went to Wood Hite and asked:

"Wood, what is the trouble between you and Dick Little?"

"Oh, it's an old quarrel," Wood Hite evasively answered.

"It has not blown over."

"How d'ye know?"

"I just now heard Dick call you a liar and a coward and swear you were afraid of him."

"Afraid of him!" roared Wood Hite, enraged and leaping to his feet. "I will show him that I am not afraid of him!"

"Wood, you had better be careful," cautioned Frank James. "Dick Little is a dead center shot with a pistol."

"I'll show him which is quickest on trigger or the center shot of the band!"

Jesse and Frank James had it all well worked up by the time the bandits assembled at supper.

Jesse had told Frank all about Wood Hite's eavesdropping and learning of the two millions of dollars worth of diamonds.

Wood Hite knew entirely too much, and the James Boys determined that he should die.

When the time came for all to assemble at supper the James Boys had the plan well arranged.

Jesse and Frank and Wood Hite, Dick Little, Jim Cummins, the Ford Brothers and Bill Chadwell were all that were to supper.

Sullen and silent Dick Little and Wood Hite came in.

With lowering brows and fire flashing eyes the bandits sat down at the table.

They intensely hated each other.

"Boys, I am getting tired of this inactivity," said Jesse to his men. "I really think it time we had something to stir up our stagnant blood."

"Do you, indeed?" asked Jim.

Dick Little, who was cramming a huge piece of steak into his mouth, said:

"I'll stir up somebody's stagnant blood myself soon."

"Wonder if that wolf has his teeth pulled!" growled Wood Hite.

"No, and there's no one here who dares try to pull 'em."

"I can whip the man who was cowardly enough to call me a liar behind my back and who don't dare to say so to my face."

"Barking dogs don't bite."

"I wish I had a chance to bite one black-headed car at this table!" cried Wood.

"Silence!"

Jesse had to make an effort at keeping peace, so he called twice more.

"Silence, boys, silence."

"Keep that dog who barks so loud silent," growled Wood Hite.

"Come, boys, there is no need for this quarrel," began Jim Cummins, in the manner of a genuine peacemaker.

"Yes, there is!" growled Wood Hite.

"Why?"

"He called me a liar and a coward."

"Who?" asked Jesse.

"Dick Little."

"Hush!"

"He did, and he has got to take it back and apologize to me, or he'll bite the dust."

"If you mean me, Wood Hite!" cried Dick Little, in an angry tone, "I'll tell you right now that I will never apologize."

"Won't you?"

"No."

"If you don't take it back you will die!"

"I am ready to see who is quickest on the trigger."

"All right."

"When do you want to settle it?"

"Now."

"Here?"

"Yes."

"Then here goes!"

Bang!

Bang!

Shouts and shrieks.

Clara and the dumb girl ran out of the room.

"Hold—hold!" cried Jim Cummins.

Jim made a grab at Wood Hite's pistol.

He caught the muzzle, but caught it too low down.

Bang!

Jim uttered a wild yell.

One of his fingers had been shot away.

"I'll kill that scoundrel yet!" roared Wood Hite.

Bang!

Bang!

Charley Ford ran under the table.

Jesse James got out of the way of the combatants and drew his pistol.

No one but Frank James and Bob Ford observed him.

Jesse's eyes were flashing with deadly fire.

"Now is the time to get rid of that villain," he said.

Bob Ford was really trying to prevent the fighting.

Wood Hite was his friend, and he was trying to protect him.

Bang! went Wood Hite's pistol.

The ball struck Dick in the leg.

He uttered a wild yell.

He was sinking, when Jesse James caught him in his arms, thrust one hand under the wounded bandit's arm and fired.

The ball struck Wood Hite to the heart, and he fell dead without a groan.

Dick Little had fainted from loss of blood.

When he recovered, Jesse said:

"Dick! You killed him!"

"Killed Wood Hite?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am glad of it. He has given me a bad leg."

"Boys, we will have to get out of here."

"Yes."

Mr. Hite, who was sitting in his big chair in the other room, was notified of his son's death.

The old man came in and looked at his son and said:

"War it fa'r? War et done fa'r, Jess?"

"Yes."

"He fit?"

"He wounded Dick so he may die."

"What are we to do with the dead body, Jesse?" asked Bob Ford.

"Let us bury it in the garden. No one will hardly think of looking there for it."

"No, surely not."

They made a rude coffin that night and dug a hole in the garden and buried him.

When they had covered him over, Jesse said:

"Now, boys, I think we had better leave old man Hite's. We must get Dick away. After what has happened it would certainly be unpleasant for him here."

Dick was that night packed off to Kentucky, where he remained until arrested by Carl Greene some two or three months later.

When all were talking about leaving Clara Hite took Jesse James aside and said:

"Are you going, too?"

"Yes."

"But the diamonds?"

"You shall see them next Friday night."

"Then you are coming back?"

"I am."

"I will trust you, Jesse."

"Punctual to the hour I will be on hand with every one of the old Zig Johnson diamonds."

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

CARL GREENE and his friend, Paul, after very narrow risks from drowning, and being crushed in the runaway, escaped and crawled out on the bank.

They had lost their weapons, and their clothes were completely saturated with water.

When they had reached the shore, they were benumbed with cold, and as miserable a pair of men as one seldom sees.

The outlaws passed down the road, and these two keen detectives easily discovered that Jesse and Frank James had both escaped.

"Well, Carl, what is your next move?" Paul Keene asked.

"How far are we from Stewartsville?"

"Several miles."

"What is the nearest town?"

"Cameron."

"Then let us go to Cameron."

They went to this thriving little town.

Here they changed their clothes, buying new suits out and out.

The detectives had to answer many curious questions about how they fell in the mud and water.

These questions were evasively answered, and when they had thoroughly recovered they left Cameron and went to Liberty.

Carl Greene, by a cunning device, kept Clara notified of his whereabouts.

She read the Kansas City Times.

And in one corner of the paper he had hired a space. In that space he had certain figures which were Greek to everybody else but herself.

She also had right to use the space if necessary.

One day a curious advertisement in cipher appeared in the square.

Nobody on earth would have known what all the rubbish meant unless they had been in the secret.

Carl Greene interpreted it as follows:

"On Friday evening, September 19th, at 9 o'clock P. M., Jesse James will display his diamonds at the house of Clara Hite.

"Come and see them.

"The outlaws are all gone save two."

Carl Greene was delighted at the intelligence.

"Paul, are you in a hurry to go away?" asked Carl.

"Not much of a hurry."

"I am going to gain my greatest victory."

"When?"

"At nine o'clock P. M., next Friday, nineteenth."

"Explain."

Carl did so.

"So they are all gone but two?"

"Yes, only Jesse and Frank James are there."

"I will try to go with you."

"There will be fun."

"I know it."

"And you will enjoy it."

"Of course, I always do."

"Well, I am heartily glad of it, for I know I can depend on you."

"Can you?"

"Paul, you know there are very few in our profession who can be depended on in this case."

"It's true."

"How shall we pass the time until then?"

"Here, there, or anywhere."

"I believe I will go to Kansas City."

"So you are here Thursday will answer."

"I will be on hand."

"I will go to Lexington in the meantime."

Consequently, next day Carl Greene went to Lexington, Mo.

There he met Miss Annie Floyd and Smith Jones, the heirs to old Zig Johnson's wealth.

"How are you succeeding?" asked Smith Jones.

"You will have your diamonds next Monday."

"Have you got them?"

"Not yet."

"Then how can you speak with such assurance?"

"Because I know whereof I speak."

"Then you mean that you have the diamonds just where you can put your hand on them?"

"That is what I mean."

"Carl Greene, you are a most wonderful man!"

"Have you recovered from your scare?"

"Yes. Carl Greene, you saved my life."

"I rather think, Mr. Jones, if I had not come up at the time I did you would have taken your last dance on nothing."

"Would not I? Why, I was so near to the Kingdom that I thought I could catch a bird's-eye view of the New Jerusalem."

"Where is Miss Floyd?"

"In this same hotel."

"You have met her?"

"Why, yes; and let me tell you a secret."

"What is it?"

"Have you ever seen her?"

"No."

"Well, by Jove, she is the prettiest girl I ever saw."

"What!"

"It's true."

"Stuck on her?"

"Well, yes, and it's as bad a case o' gone as you ever saw in all your life."

"Well, how about the girl?"

"Well I think I am all right there."

And Mr. Smith Jones laughed.

"Then the prospect for uniting a fortune in diamonds is pretty good, is it not?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"All right, I will try and secure the diamonds."

They went to call on Miss Floyd, whom Carl Greene found as pretty as she had been described by her lover, Mr. Smith.

He parted from them, assuring them that he would use his best endeavors to secure to them their rightful inheritance.

Carl Greene took the midnight train for Liberty.

At the appointed time and place, Carl Greene and Paul Keene met and laid their plans for final action.

"Will they fight?" asked Paul.

"Fight! Certainly. There is no doubt but that they will fight."

"Well, we will have to get the first shot in at them."

The nearest railway station to old man Hite's house was five miles.

The detective who had been chasing the James Boys for so long, got off at this station and walked to the house through the most dense thickets and woods.

When they reached the neighborhood of the

house they paused until just before dark, when Carl led the way to an old dead tree.

They had been here but a few minutes when Clara Hite joined them.

"You have come?" she said. "And this is an assistant?"

"Yes," answered Carl Greene.

"It is well. The James Boys have not come yet. Come and let me conceal you in the house."

It was growing dusk, and the bushes and trees grew almost up to the house.

The detectives were conducted unseen to the place, where they entered the house unseen.

In a few moments she had them concealed in one of the panels of which the house boasted.

They were next to her room, and had only to push back a sliding panel to enter it.

Here they waited until nine o'clock with cocked pistols in their hands.

Mrs. Hite, who was now happy because Jesse was to be entrapped, went about the house singing merrily, while her aged husband sat dozing in his great arm-chair.

The hour came and with it Frank and Jesse James.

Jesse carried the case of jewels under his arm

They went straight to Clara's room, where the jewels were opened.

As Jesse turned to get a chair, Mrs. Hite cried:

"Oh, ain't they beauties!"

This was the signal.

In a moment the panels shot back, and Carl Greene and Paul leaped out, and each held a cocked revolver.

Seizing the jewels, they cried:

"Surrender!"

Frank and Jesse both fled.

Bang!

Bang!

Two shots followed them.

Carl Greene clung to the jewels and gave chase.

The James Boys mounted their horses.

Carl and Paul found horses in the barn, and mounting gave chase.

They pursued Jesse and Frank for two hundred miles, but they escaped.

This was the James Boys' last flight.

When they returned to Missouri shortly after, Bob Ford killed Jesse, and Frank surrendered to Crittenden.

Carl Greene, on the next Monday, delivered

the diamonds worth two millions of dollars to Mr. Smith and Miss Floyd, the heirs of old Zig Johnson.

They each gave him two hundred thousand dollars in jewels.

This was Carl Greene's greatest victory, for he had recovered every jewel from the outlaws, something which expert detectives had in newspaper interviews declared impossible.

Mrs. Clara Hite came to Lexington, and Carl Greene gave her twenty-five thousand dollars for her very valuable assistance.

"I am not satisfied, and will not be," she declared, her pretty eyes flashing fire, "until Jesse is dead and I am the cause of it!"

She began at once to work on Bob Ford who, as a friend of Wood Hite, was enraged at Jesse for murdering him. Bob consented at last to kill Jesse, which he did.*

Smith Jones and Annie Floyd were married, and this united their great fortunes.

Carl Greene was satisfied with his work.

He had chased the James Boys out of Missouri and won his greatest victory.

[THE END.]

* See "Life and Death of Jesse James," No. 466 of THE NEW YORK DETECTIVE LIBRARY.

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